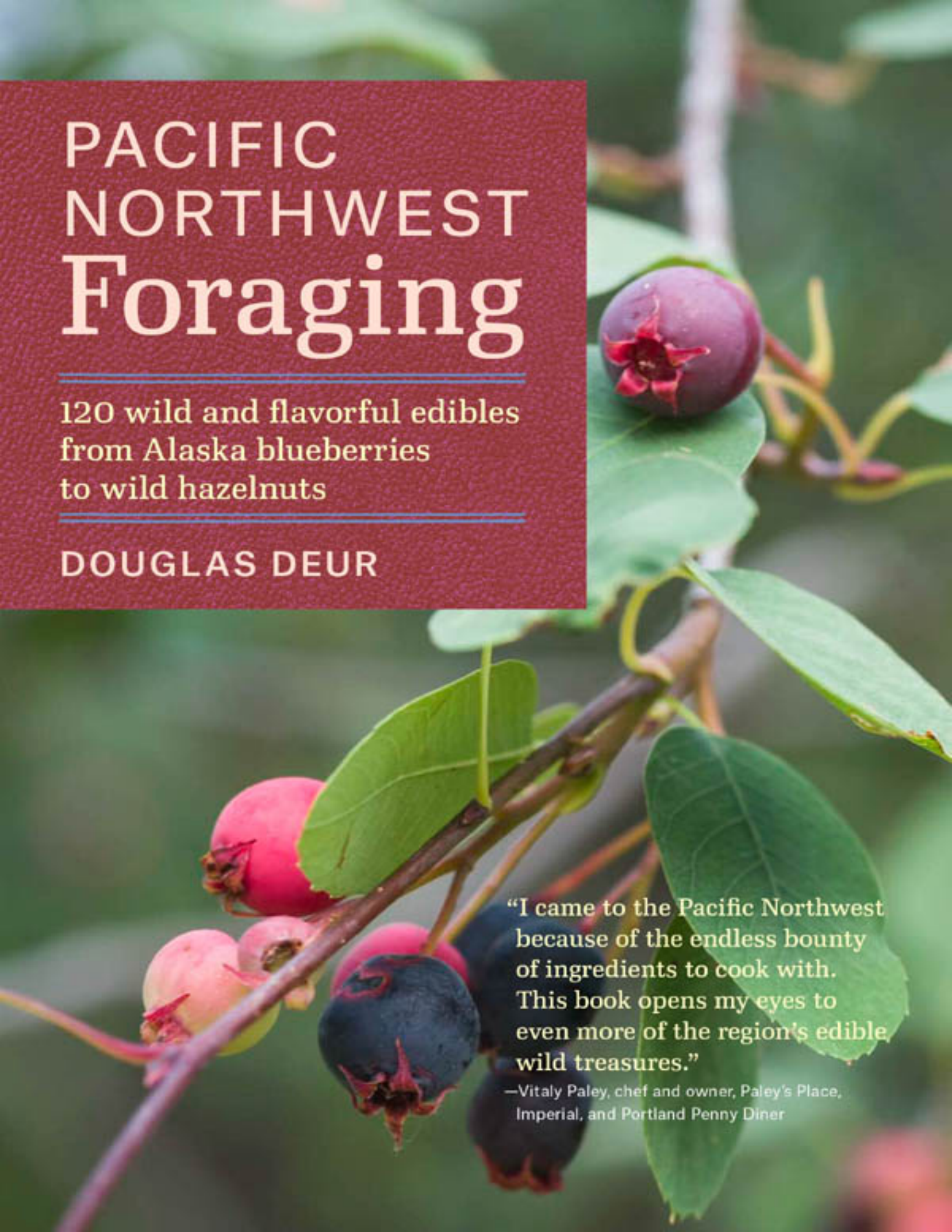


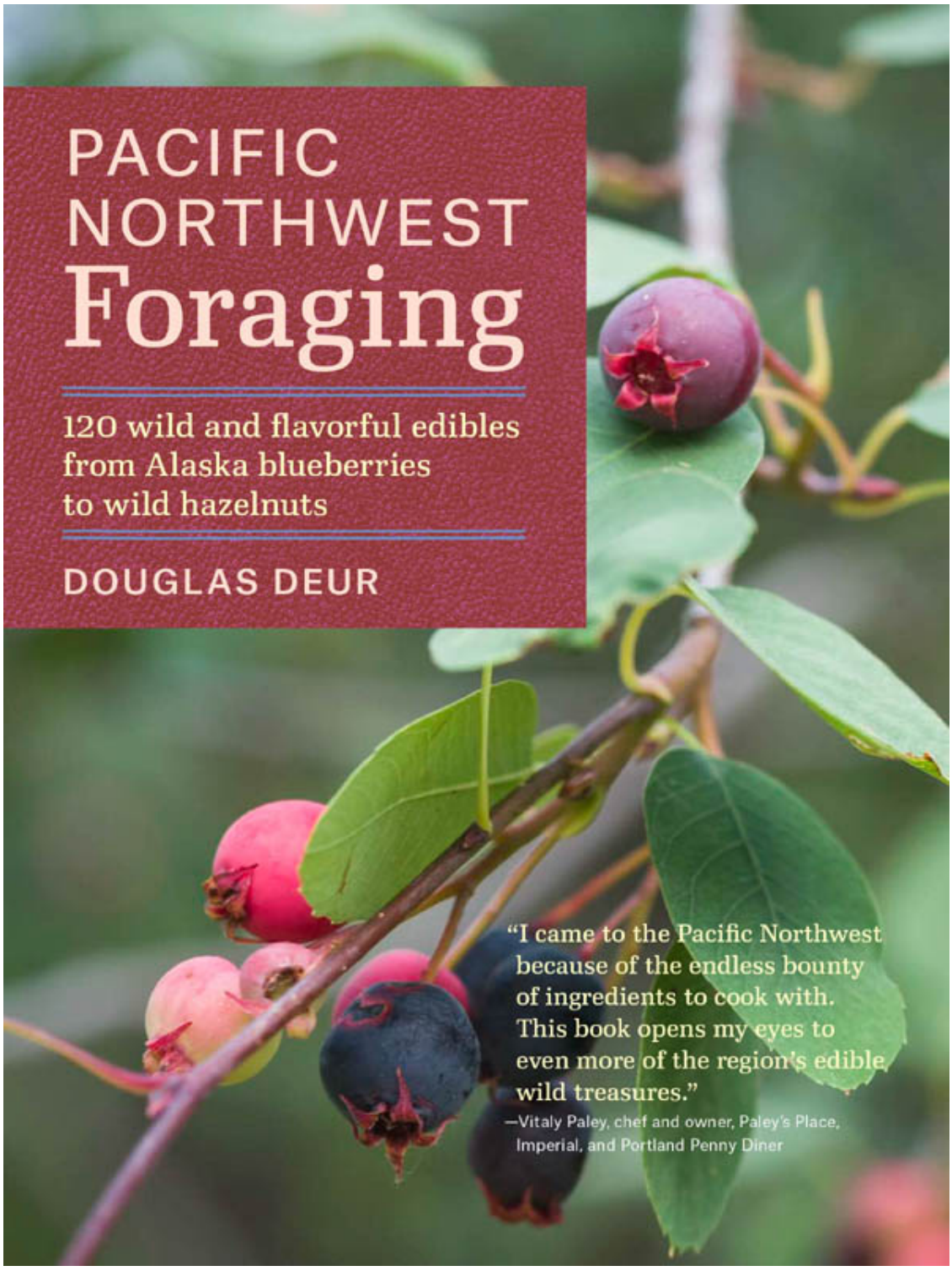
PACIFIC NORTHWEST Foraging

120 wild and flavorful edibles from Alaska blueberries to wild hazelnuts

DOUGLAS DEUR

"I came to the Pacific Northwest because of the endless bounty of ingredients to cook with. This book opens my eyes to even more of the region's edible wild treasures."

—Vitaly Paley, chef and owner, Paley's Place, Imperial, and Portland Penny Diner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TIMBER PRESS
Portland.London

Frontispiece: Wildflower fields of biscuitroot yellow and camas blue sprawl across undisturbed lands in the interior Northwest, their sweet and flavorful roots lying just below the ground.

The information in this book is true and complete to the best of our knowledge. All recommendations are made without guarantee on the part of the author or Timber Press. The author and publisher disclaim any liability in connection with the use of this information. In particular, eating wild plants is inherently risky. Plants can be easily mistaken and individuals vary in their physiological reactions to plants that are touched or consumed.

Photography credits appear on page 278.

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To my teachers and their teachers before them.

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Preface

Growing up between Portland's exurban fringe and Oregon's wind-beaten north coast, I experienced a childhood that played out alongside the deep green backdrop of Northwestern native plants. My earliest memories involve crawling through patches of wild strawberries that my mother had transplanted and tended into a robust backyard groundcover. When, as a toddler, I needed to nap but resisted, my mother walked me through the Douglas-fir and cedar forest behind our home, asking me to identify each plant by name until fatigue set in and I drifted off to sleep, with visions of Oregon grape and wild lilies dancing in my head. We cut trails into the blackberry thicket tangles in summertime to find the biggest and juiciest berries. We scaled mountains, where we gathered wild onions and ate handfuls of huckleberries as we watched ravens and red-tailed hawks ride the thermals below. Academic confirmation of these landscape lessons came from unique venues: special wild food programs sponsored by the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry and other regional organizations, taught by retired professors and earnest hippy biologists. Cumulatively, these experiences were the cornerstones of my early education and gave me insights that I still draw from as a professor and researcher today. I sincerely hope that future generations of children will be so fortunate as to experience this kind of hands-on learning upon the land and, through that process, gain a profound love and understanding of this verdant home of ours. If this book helps a parent usher even one child along a similar journey, I will consider the entire writing project a great success.

As I entered adulthood, though, I was disappointed to learn that the landscapes and plants that I valued so much were seen as an anonymous tangle to many Northwesterners, just so much green noise scarcely noticed as they motored past or bulldozed through. I increasingly sensed the nagging truth behind Lewis Mumford's admonition that our national flower had become "the concrete cloverleaf" of the highway interchange, even

here in the Pacific Northwest. Perhaps it is the fact that we Americans mostly descend from immigrant peoples, with relatively shallow histories in this far-flung corner of the continent. Perhaps it is the fact that we are largely children of an urbanized, industrial age, which has undervalued those resources that are local, wild, and free in exchange for those that are universal, interchangeable, and revenue-producing. Whatever the reason, I have long felt that there was a need to address our chronic dissociation from the landscape. A deeper appreciation of useful plants might help us to see that landscape anew and with greater interest and investment. Certainly, edible plants are all around us, a rich source of food, beauty, entertainment, enlightenment, and many other pleasures, if only we pay attention. Ironically, we are all inheritors of a great prosperity of which most of us know very little.

Eating red huckleberries along a forest path.

Well-intentioned people have sometimes called out in alarm when they have seen my children eat even the most common edible berries, astonished, grasping for their cell phones, unsure if they should first call a poison control center or child protective services. I appreciate their concern. Fortunately, the times are changing, and people are tentatively reconnecting to plants and places in myriad ways, with welcome energy and experimentation. Workshops, field trips, blogs, and any number of other venues are emerging, celebrating native foods as a solution to many of the economic, nutritional, and ecological challenges of the age. Perhaps, in time, those well-intentioned people with the cell phones and the angst will put down their phones, pick up a berry bucket, and harvest merrily alongside my kids. We will all be better for it.

Chief Kwaxistalla Adam Dick, a highly trained Kwakwaka'wakw clan chief, sharing his knowledge of plant gathering traditions.

In my quest to understand these matters, I had the opportunity to work with some of the best teachers available, both in the world of academia and among the Northwest's Native American cultural leaders. I worked with outstanding biogeographers and ethnobotanists in universities in Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and beyond, seeking an understanding of the

natural history of the Northwest and the consequences of human activities on regional ecologies. I was also able to work with many great Native teachers—Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl), Tlingit, Coast Salish, Klamath, and many others—seeking to comprehend and help document their exceedingly rich repertoire of cultural knowledge related to plants. In time, I was adopted by more than one tribe, but most relevant here by the Kawakadillika clan of the Kwakwaka'wakw. Their chief, Kwaxistalla Adam Dick, has instructed me over the years with a mixture of chiefly generosity and paternal patience. Sequestered from the non-Native world as a child, Adam received from the elders of his day unique and focused training in all aspects of traditional resource management, from the mechanics of plant harvesting to the philosophical foundations of plant cultivation and associated rituals. These elders gave him this training, motivated by prophecies that through such an urgent educational undertaking they might ensure that their cultural knowledge survived into the modern day. I consider myself an enormously fortunate beneficiary of their efforts. So, too, readers of this book are beneficiaries, indirectly, of the labors of these elders hailing from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this book, I have had to strike a balance, presenting what is common knowledge among traditional harvesters, while steering clear of the medicines, ceremonial uses, and other highly sensitive and proprietary forms of knowledge. There are no state secrets contained herein, but the content and perspectives of this book clearly bear the imprint of my own teachings from this rich and venerable tradition.

It is to my teachers and their teachers before them that I dedicate this book. For this reason, a specific portion of my proceeds from this book will be used to help support programs in the region with Native oversight that document traditional ecological knowledge and ensure its perpetuation for the benefit of future generations through educational programs for young people, both Native and non-Native. It is my hope that, through such efforts, we will continue to learn from the intimate relationships that human communities have maintained with Northwestern environments over the millennia, and this knowledge may yet inform modern people as we seek to make a sustainable home here in the Pacific Northwest, for the long haul.

The gathering of wild plant foods is a small business in a way—the plucking of a few trailside berries here and there as you pass by—but it is also part of something much bigger, the greater sweep of history and the fate of the region's ecosystems. Either way, it is clear that we are in this together, from the tribal elders carrying forward ancient wisdom to the young foodies and bloggers whose experimentation adds spicy new ingredients to the mix. You can approach wild food gathering from whichever perspective you wish. Whatever your motivations, you are enthusiastically invited. Happy harvesting!

Edible Plants of the Pacific Northwest: An Invitation

The Pacific Northwest, an ecological region that extends from southern Oregon to southeastern Alaska, abounds with opportunities to harvest wild plants. Yet few Northwesterners have had the chance to really explore their options for wild plant gathering on the ground or to develop an appreciation for the range of food plant possibilities that our verdant home affords. I wrote this book as a guide for aspiring wild food harvesters, to aid those who hope to identify, gather, and eat many of the plants that one might encounter when traveling through the landscape. The guide is meant to foster exploration, discovery, and a sense of delightful engagement with these plants and their habitats, whether they are found in the remote Northwestern backcountry or in our own backyards.

Wonderfully diverse and rich options exist for harvesting wild plant foods in the Pacific Northwest. The forests, fields, wetlands, and shorelines of the region offer up a brilliant diversity of edible berries, bright green shoots, tasty green leaves, and sweet earthy roots. Even in the least probable times and places, one can find an impromptu snack in the freshly sprouted leaves of any number of plants, the buds of some conifer trees, the inner stem of most grasses, the sprouts of sagebrush that pop up in the drier parts of the region, or the little weeds peeking from between cracks in the concrete. Add together all of this natural bounty, and the tally suggests that —if the time is right—you can find a free meal almost anywhere you travel within the Pacific Northwest.

Although wild plant harvesting is gaining more attention with each passing year, it is hardly a new concept. For countless generations, the wild plant foods of the Pacific Northwest sustained Native American communities, augmenting a diet rich in salmon and other animal foods. Elaborate plant cultivation and harvest methods were integral to Native economies, and plants have figured prominently in their social, cultural, and ceremonial worlds. For the settlers who arrived in the region in the nineteenth century, wild plant foods provided welcome relief at the end of the dusty trail, offered enduring protection from scarcity in the lean times, and sometimes added the promise of sweet diversity to their limited dietary repertoire. Not every plant was alien to these newly arrived souls. To the contrary, some of our edible local plant species and genera were found in the eastern United States and a few even in northern Europe. Some newly arriving families took to them readily.

Red and evergreen huckleberries gathered near Tofino, British Columbia, for an impromptu and highly nutritious snack.

As these new settlers struggled mightily to wrest an agricultural lifestyle from the land, changing the landscape to accommodate the needs of domesticated plants and animals from distant places, they commonly turned away from wild plant foods as soon as their circumstances allowed. Indeed, as the region began to modernize, many in polite society ignored these wild food resources intentionally, attributing their use to bumpkins and people without better options. My own grandparents downplayed the considerable wild food plant knowledge of their lean Northwestern childhoods, wishing to shake the mud conclusively from their boots in the mid-twentieth century and embrace the processed foods and horrible white bread that were so emblematic of success in their era.

Only among Native peoples and those living on the geographic or countercultural fringes of non-Native society did wild food harvesting retain its relevance and its cachet. The embers of plant food knowledge were kept alive in these places, being resuscitated somewhat and reintroduced into the national consciousness by shaggy backpacker types, as the 1960s sent many urban people back to the land in search of food and freedom.

Today, the picture is much more lively and complex. For very good reasons, the global industrial food economy has earned its own stigma, and polite society seems to pay growing homage to things organic and locally produced. Accordingly, wild food harvesting holds the interest of an expanding and surprisingly diverse range of people living in our communities. Among today's wild harvesters we still have our backpackers, some of them still quite shaggy, but the ranks of wild food enthusiasts have expanded exponentially to include foodies, organic eaters, locavores, paleodieters, permaculturists, health-conscious backyard gardeners, berry-picking bicyclists, parents looking for opportunities for their kids to engage in the natural world, and people acting from environmental convictions or inspired by their cross-cultural interests in Native American traditions. Rugged off-the-grid types and even a few wild-eyed survivalists take a considerable interest in wild plant foods, too, owing to the self-sufficiency that wild foods might allow. Taken together, these groups represent a remarkably wide cross section of Northwesterners—in many cases, our friends, family, and neighbors.

These people are correct when they assert that there are good reasons to harvest wild plant foods. As an inexpensive source of food, wild plants are hard to beat, of course, but the virtues are much broader than that. Harvesting wild plants has a range of benefits that are economic, social, educational, nutritional, and perhaps even spiritual. Traditionally in Native societies—and increasingly among non-Native communities as well—plant food harvests are a time for people to come together, to share stories, observations, plant knowledge, and recipes. The pursuit of these plants allows people to connect with their surroundings, follow the natural cycles, learn, and take young people out onto the land to experience the natural world and the many values of shared work.

It is also clear that wild food harvesting is a very healthy pursuit. The plants mentioned in this book, by and large, are highly nutritious. Many of the berries are especially outstanding foods for children, pregnant women, and those with special nutritional needs—delivering impressive doses of micronutrients similar to many wild-grown whole foods; the same is true of several roots, leaves, and shoots described here. The traditional Native American diet of the region, which is rich in salmon, a veritable rainbow of antioxidant-rich berries, and freshly picked wild greens, clearly resembles the nutrient-dense cuisine being promoted by modern dieticians and health specialists worldwide. Wild plant foods commonly exhibit a broad spectrum of nutrients, with abundant trace minerals and antioxidants. Many of the foods, such as wild berries, have astonishingly high ORAC (oxygen radical absorbance capacity) values that are theoretically linked to longevity and disease prevention. Most of these wild plants grow with little or no exposure to herbicides and pesticides. We therefore can consume them without participating in the various semi-voluntary chemistry experiments that accompany the consumption of commercial products from the industrial food chain. Add to this equation a bit of hiking to get harvesters to and from some of the more interesting plant gathering sites, and these wild plant foods are sure to make you feel better about yourself and your diet.

Indeed, within Native American cuisine traditions, food and medicine are not separate categories, a revelation that is shared with other great food traditions of the world, such as those of China. Food can be healing, and

many medicines are also foods. I note some of these connections in the pages that follow.

Although this book introduces ideas and information that are sure to interest even seasoned wild plant enthusiasts, I emphasize enough basic information to launch even first-timers into the happy pursuit of plant gathering. In its breadth, too, this guide is meant as a point of introduction. If we were to add up all the edible native and naturalized vascular plants living wild in the Pacific Northwest, as well as all the fungi, lichens, and marine algae that one might also wish to eat, we would have no fewer than 300 edible species, and perhaps quite a few more.

The question of which plants to include in this guide involved striking a kind of balance. When writing this book, I consulted several wild food guides from other times and other regions. Some were brief and superficial, giving thin sketches of only the most common plants, ones that almost anyone with a passing curiosity in the subject would already know. At the other end of the spectrum were the foraging guides that—apparently in the interest of comprehensiveness—offered readers step-by-step instructions on, for example, how to induce a slug to expel its stomach contents so that, when cooked, the whole creature might be more palatable. I propose nothing so extreme within these pages. If your situation has devolved to the point that you are inducing a slug to vomit as a prelude to your next meal, you are probably beyond my help. I wish you every success in the dystopia you might now occupy.

Instead, this book attempts to navigate the middle ground between aesthetic and utilitarian goals. It includes many of the wild plants that are especially tasty, wild strawberries, blackberries, and huckleberries, for example. Yet it also includes some plants that are ubiquitous in the Pacific Northwest and, while not especially tasty, are available in abundance if you are in need—consider the lowly skunk cabbage and sword fern. I've generally excluded ambiguously edible plants: those that taste like dirt, require hours of gathering to obtain a single mouthful, or are likely to be confused with poisonous species. I also do not promote the harvesting of rare and threatened plants, no matter how tasty they may be, though I may illuminate options for their care and propagation with an eye to future harvests.

Part botanical guide and part how-to manual, this book seeks to show aspiring wild plant harvesters how to gather and use wild plants of many kinds. I discuss the potential of about 100 plants found in forests, fields, wetlands, and shorelines of the Pacific Northwest, showing you how to make the most of their berries, shoots, nuts, roots, saps, and bark. I want to illuminate both the opportunities and challenges of wild plant harvesting by identifying habitats, describing flavors, comparing harvesting methods, and outlining possibilities for food storage and preparation. I try to prepare wild harvesters for the minor pitfalls that might accompany their quest, such as how to avoid accidentally eating a bug hidden within a salal berry or getting blisters when peeling the tender and tasty stalks of cow parsnip. I also offer tantalizingly brief advice on the culinary possibilities of wild plant foods, with all due references to pies, jams, salads, smoothies, and other concoctions, in the hope that this will foster experimentation and exploration of the rapidly growing list of recipes available from print and online sources.

Each plant's description starts with basic identifying information, including a short physical description and photographs to aid you in identifying that species, as well as a short synopsis of its main food uses. This descriptive material is followed by a short vignette about the plant, its virtues, and some relevant facts about its cultural and natural history; Native American knowledge and uses of these plants receives frequent mention. Each vignette is then followed by sections outlining the practicalities of gathering, preparation, and eating for that particular species. I also provide some information on how to avoid overharvesting and enhance the availability of wild plants. Finally, some plant entries contain a short warning section because these plants are not entirely safe for human consumption without special processing or for any person who has certain medical conditions.

Recommendations for further reading, including aids to plant identification, are discussed at the end of the book for those seeking more in-depth investigations of the plant world. For those readers who are more familiar with metric units, there are tables for converting inches to centimeters and feet to meters. The book's index is a complete list of all the

plants’ common names, alternative common names, and scientific names, providing an easy way to find the plant you want to learn more about.

The give and take of wild harvesting

This book is somewhat unique among plant gathering guides, in that it speaks directly to how you, as the plant harvester, can help foster the growth of food plants in wild settings. Every plant entry in this book is accompanied by a “Future Harvests” section, in which I offer basic guidance on how to avoid local overharvesting and increase the natural availability of wild plants through the use of simple enhancement methods. This was not done casually, but after much reflection. In fact, it is not clear that I would have been able to write this book if future harvests had not been a central theme.

Some plants, such as sand verbena, are edible but are also rare in many places. Few harvesting details are revealed here, but conservation is still encouraged.

Crabapples, gathered by Tsimshian elders in Hartley Bay, British Columbia, continue to present themselves abundantly where people have tended semi-cultivated orchards, demonstrating the advantages of long-term stewardship.

Many wild plants struggle to find a home in the rapidly transformed Northwestern landscape, as it is reshaped by expanding cities, intensive agriculture, and industrial forestry. The Native elders who work with me bemoan the generally declining abundance of most of their critical plant foods, and they attribute this trend to a mixture of abuse, negligence, and overharvesting. In this light, the creation of a guidebook that might introduce untold numbers of people to the edible plant life of the Northwest is an action with consequences. There are more people living in the large cities of the region—Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver—than lived in the largest cities on Earth when this land was encountered by Europeans a little over two centuries ago. Unleashing plant harvesters on the natural landscape with an unqualified invitation to simply take seems reckless at best.

When first approached to write this book, I consulted with some of the wisest elders I know, including the Kwakwaka'wakw chief, Kwaxistalla Adam Dick, with whom I have ties of friendship and kinship. I asked if I should undertake this book project at all, and if so, how. Their message was consistent. They advised me to proceed with the book, but to embed it with a key lesson: by consuming a plant or its parts, you enter into a relationship with it. The plant is giving something of itself, sometimes even giving its life for our sustenance, and we incur a certain obligation in return. In the traditional way of viewing the world, there is no such thing as a free lunch.

In the old times, when anything was consumed in large quantities, people were required to acknowledge the sacrifice of the plants or animals, show genuine appreciation, and reciprocate in ways that were meaningful. Even today, traditionally minded people believe that it is important to feel thankful, to utter words of thanks, or to take other, more concrete steps to maintain a well-balanced relationship with prey species. These values are woven through the familiar first salmon ceremonies of Northwestern tribes, which thanked the salmon for their sacrifices each year, but also through their lesser known first food ceremonies relating to plant foods. In many cases, these ceremonies were bound to the methods of plant enhancement used by Native communities. To show thanks for the berries, we toss some of them back to the ground in new locations; to show thanks for the camas, we burn off the old dead shrubs and grasses that choke out its new growth. If people showed their respect and perhaps did something special like this to aid these species, the food species were said to return consistently and abundantly into the future. Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday has called such a relationship "reciprocal appropriation." By this Native view, if we take, take, and take some more, but do not find ways to reciprocate, the relationship falls precariously out of balance, and the species on which we rely may fail to return—for reasons as much spiritual as biological. Overexploitation is not just a mechanical reality but a social and spiritual one, requiring thought and diligence as to the status of our relationship with those species.

This old system is difficult to employ in modern times, with our mechanized food production and our dissociation from local environments. Too often we come to the natural world with a sense of entitlement but no

concept of our own place in the reciprocal give-and-take that holds that world together. Yet these elders' words give us some clues about how to keep up our end of the bargain as modern harvesters of wild plant foods. Although the prospect of a book like this one sending thousands of people into the forest to appropriate anything they fancy struck the elders I consulted as terrifying and destructive, the prospect of these same thousands of people heading into the forest to help enliven the species on which people depend was greeted as positively uplifting. And with that prospect as a guiding vision, I was asked to proceed.

In this spirit, I have filled the book with recommendations for how you might help care for these wild plants and aid in their wild dispersal and propagation. I focus here on what might be called wild propagation, the propagation and dispersal of wild plants within wild settings, instead of within bounded gardens. I discuss how to expand the quantity and distribution of wild food plants, how to use these plants to reoccupy damaged and disturbed areas, and how to offset any tangible negative impacts of wild food harvesting. The wild propagation of plants in many cases helps these plants to adapt to the novel disturbances that now plague them, from the heavy footprint of industrial forestry to accelerated climate change. It is not imperative that we participate in wild propagation every time we harvest wild plant foods, but it is critical that we integrate this perspective into our thinking about these plants and reciprocate when the time seems right. It is perfectly acceptable to give some wild plants preferential treatment, scattering seeds from a particularly tasty specimen close to our homes, in the hope that this tastiness may have a genetic basis and continue to brighten our days and our cuisine in years to come.

There may be a few who would object to taking an active hand in the propagation of plants in wild settings. The elders might counter that these objections are rooted in romantic, almost Victorian notions of wildness, which presume that nature existed in a pristine and essentially untouched condition until recent times. Native peoples and natural disturbances together kept the landscape dynamic long ago. Over the past two centuries, the Northwestern landscape has been getting worked over by new technologies, machines, values, and economies, leaving relatively few places untouched and unmodified. If these changes have mostly served to

benefit weeds and invasive plants, it is perhaps time to honor the plants that have sustained us, and might continue to sustain us, in this reworked landscape.

Propagation can be somewhat passive: tossing a few berries or spitting seeds strategically along a path. These methods are surprisingly effective in some settings, ensuring rich harvests for years to come. Propagation can also be active: transplanting suitable plants to new settings and even into gardens. Plants that are valuable sources of foods are also attractive landscape plants, and we perform a kind of environmental service by bringing these largely extirpated wild plants back into cities and other settled places. Native plants are known to local birds, pollinating insects, and myriad other living things. Their use supports ecological relationships of great complexity and antiquity and helps to maintain the biological diversity and resiliency of the Pacific Northwest. They are also showy and useful in gardens, and it is sometimes possible to develop cultivars of these species. These plants are also outstanding additions to recently exposed soils along roadsides, at recently restored brownfields and wetlands, and in any number of settings where they might have the chance to reestablish colonies of wild plants on disturbed ground. Not all of these settings might be suitable for later harvest, but the presence of these plants still ensures that they maintain broad geographical ranges, genetic diversity, and symbiotic associations with birds and insects, for example, that are critical for the well-being of the larger population.

Many species, such as Nootka rose, are both wonderfully ornamental and extraordinarily useful as a source of plant foods.

This kind of active transplantation must be done cautiously if we are to have a modest footprint on the natural vegetation. If too many inexperienced people haul away vast numbers of natural seedlings on misguided propagation efforts, this might bring its own negative environmental consequences. Some extra care has to be used to ensure that the relocation of a plant does not do more harm than good—compromising a rare wild plant colony, for example, or moving wild plants into suboptimum habitats. I provide a little guidance on this in the pages ahead, but for those eager to take an active hand in plant propagation I highly recommend consulting some of the books written specifically about this subject. A few good ones are cited in “Recommendations for Further Reading” at the end of this book.

Just as replanting or reseeding a plant may help sustain wild plants, so too does the avoidance of overharvesting. There are some fundamental ethical and biological questions as to where and how much to gather.

Different plants have different thresholds for overexploitation, and the threat of overharvest varies considerably from place to place. One needs to look at the particular plant and setting carefully. In most cases, selective harvesting should be our goal, gathering only a modest percentage of the seeds or berries on a plant or within a patch. We should avoid harvesting in a manner that kills perennial plants if it is possible to harvest without killing, and we should try to avoid harvesting annual plants without giving the patch a chance to produce seeds or otherwise reproduce. Useful standards for sustainable wild plant harvests, reflecting these sorts of concepts, have been developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (cms.iucn.org) and the FairWild Foundation (fairwild.org).

Black huckleberries are among the most popular berries in the Northwest, traditionally picked by Native Americans in fire-managed settings in the high mountains and now quite popular with harvesters from all backgrounds.

Other forms of stewardship might accompany wild plant harvesting. Although this book's emphasis is on native plants, there are many non-native plants worth eating. Most of these weedy plants have followed in the footsteps of European peoples as they expanded across the North American continent in recent times, their seeds riding on the wind, in grain bins, or on the mud of tires and boots. In fact, some of these weeds, such as dandelion, shepherd's purse, and many clovers, have ancient relationships with European peoples. Some moved into Western Europe in remote times, as ancestral European tribes brought their crops and livestock westward across that continent, clearing forests and settling the land. In this light, it is not surprising that most of our modern weeds are descended from Eurasian wild plants that opportunistically occupy disturbed ground, and they are most thankful for our tendency to disturb more ground with each passing year. Other, more imposing non-native species, such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan blackberry, were incorporated into gardens, only to escape from cultivation in our mild climate, allowing them to gradually engulf the Northwestern landscape one acre at a time. It is possible to keep invasive non-native plant species at least partially in check simply by eating them. In this book, I promote the eating of weeds such as dandelion and shepherd's purse, which are common throughout the region and quite popular among wild food enthusiasts. I also promote the consumption of shoots from extremely invasive plants such as Himalayan blackberry and Japanese knotweed, recognizing that this may not extirpate these species, even if we wanted to, but may help to keep them from achieving almost total dominion over our vacant lots and roadsides. I do not advocate wild propagation of these species—that would be reckless—but I do encourage harvesters to be respectful toward any living thing you rely upon for sustenance, even the weeds.

This book has a conservation message, then, that is not only philosophical but meant to be very practical. In each of the plant descriptions that follow, I give specific advice for selective harvesting methods that might minimize adverse effects of harvesting on native plant communities, and I highlight opportunities for the harvest and use of invasive non-native plants in a manner that simultaneously satisfies our appetites for good cuisine and pest control. Likewise, I show how you

might participate in the propagation of naturally occurring plants in yards or in wild settings—tossing a few seeds here, planting a few sprouts there—in a way that mirrors Native American traditional practices and will ensure the continued abundance and viability of harvestable wild plants for generations to come.

A time and place for wild harvesting

Time goes in circles. Every year, plants and their habitats undergo annual cycles that shape the timing of the food harvest. These cycles are mostly predictable, allowing wild plant harvesters to plan in advance and time their travels so that they can make the most of these natural rhythms. Northwest Native American communities traditionally moved from place to place in anticipation of these cycles, and their names for months and seasons were often references to the plants, fish, and other species that presented themselves at the corresponding time of the year. If we wish to succeed at the seasonal harvest of wild plant foods, we too need to heed these cycles.

The ecological region addressed in this book, running from Oregon's southern border to southeastern Alaska, extends over distances in excess of 1500 miles (2400 km) and up to 18 degrees of latitude. Although the mix of plant species found within this region is surprisingly consistent, there are clear differences in the timing and availability of most plants across this latitudinal range. Species that produce leaves or berries in very early spring at the southern end may not do so until weeks later in the far north. So, too, the elevations within this rugged region vary tremendously, from sea level to well over 10,000 feet in many places. Plants in high-elevation areas often lie dormant for much of the year, only to experience an astonishing, if brief, burst of productivity once the snow melts in summer.

Salmonberries grow abundantly in the spring and early summer months, occupying forest clearings, stream margins, and other places where sunshine is able to illuminate damp places.

The high mountains have plant harvesting opportunities that are worthy of attention, with certain unique food plant species growing alongside those that can also be found at lower elevations. Native harvesters often have been drawn to these high-elevation areas to gather a plethora of species, including black huckleberry, nodding onion, and yellow avalanche lily. Such migrations were key to the traditional seasonal round that sometimes called for annual migration between elevation zones as a way to make the most of the shifting geography of plant and animal productivity throughout the year. Non-Native harvesters have also adopted aspects of this migratory tradition, which has its analogues in many other parts of the world. Many mountain harvesters attest that the plants gathered at high elevations sometimes have better flavors, medicinal potency, nutrition, or sweetness than their low-elevation counterparts, a fact that seems to be supported by scientific studies suggesting that the struggle of high mountain living may amplify plants' production of various natural compounds. For modern harvesters, it is possible to begin the harvesting year at low elevations and slowly shift attention to the higher places as the year wears on and the snow

melts off, only to come back down the mountains, focusing on lower-elevation harvesting prospects in autumn.

Of course, the Pacific Northwest is not one large homogeneous region, but is composed of a mosaic of ecological subregions, each presenting distinctive opportunities for wild plant harvests. Beginning near the sea, the coastal strip facing the Pacific Ocean bears the brunt of Pacific storms, receiving some of the heaviest rain in the region, along with summer fogs that keep this area perennially damp. Moist Sitka spruce forests dominate the landscape, and estuaries and beaches provide unique and dynamic harvesting possibilities: edible seaweeds, root vegetables of the tide flats, an abundance of salal and other berries, with some of the best gathering at the well-lit forest margins. The coastal ranges of Oregon and Washington also receive a tremendous amount of rain and are shrouded in forests of western hemlock, Douglas-fir, and occasional western red cedar. Edible plant options are diverse, with an abundance of fern and berry species, for example, offering a wide range of harvesting options. Sitting on the northern and southern extremities of this coast range, the Olympic Mountains and Klamath Mountains are tall and rugged, offering an even greater diversity of plant gathering opportunities, including subalpine plant habitats resembling those of the Cascade Range. The interior lowlands and valleys of the Northwest sit in the rain shadow of these coastal ranges and are relatively dry. These areas include the Willamette Valley, the Puget Sound and Strait of Georgia lowlands, as well as such interior valleys as the upper Rogue and Umpqua Basins in southwestern Oregon. This is where most of the people of the modern Northwest live. In these places, dry conditions and a history of fires (including Native American burning of the landscape) have produced unique oak savannahs and grasslands, offering camas, tarweed, acorns, and other edible species uncommon in other parts of the Northwest. To the east, the Cascade Range rises high above the surrounding landscape on a long, volcano-studded north–south arc, providing varied plant gathering options that shift as one moves upslope or down. Forest vegetation and harvest offerings are similar to those of the coastal range on lower slopes, but higher elevations grade into unique habitats, containing wild lilies, onions, and huckleberries, for example, that are rare elsewhere in the region. The drier interior places east of the

Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges—eastern Oregon, Washington, and interior British Columbia—are home to sagebrush plains, juniper, and larger conifers perched on ridges and offer their own unique harvest options, such as distinctive wild currants, gooseberries, yampah, biscuitroot, pine seeds, and sage. East of the Cascade Range there are also vast lakes and marshes that are home to huge flocks of birds, but also to yellow pond-lily, tule, and many other marsh species. To the north, the Coast Ranges of British Columbia and southeastern Alaska are deeply dissected by fjords and rivers. The outer coast is shrouded in the characteristic Sitka spruce forests of the Pacific Ocean shoreline, whereas the interior exhibits plants similar to those of the Coast and Cascade Ranges. As we proceed northward, cold-weather species appear, such as high-bush cranberry, red currant, and bog huckleberry. Wild harvesters can travel widely, exploring Northwestern landscapes and plant opportunities alike.

Habitats such as wetlands, meadows, riparian areas, and coastlines provide some of the richest gathering opportunities in the Pacific Northwest. These places typically have an abundance of moisture and sunlight and are often edge environments, where many different species converge. Freshwater wetlands, for example, offer cattail, tule, edible clover and thistles, yarrow, bog huckleberry, watercress, yellow pond-lily, wapato, trapper’s tea, and occasionally camas. Slightly saline coastal wetlands also provide access to springbank clover, silverweed, and riceroot lily, and their margins are often good gathering places for eelgrass, wild strawberry, yarrow, goosefoot, and shrubby species such as salal, evergreen huckleberry, and wild rose. The wild harvesting options abound in such places. When formerly degraded wetlands are restored, planners might consider the wild food opportunities when determining their palette of plants, for these environments are veritable gardens to wild harvesters.

The abundance of berries in the region is also impressive. Plants have various options for how they reproduce and distribute their genetic material across the land. Some of the common methods, such as wind dispersal of fluff-borne seeds, do not work well in a damp and densely forested setting. In such environments, berries are outstanding vehicles for a plant’s genetic material. Their durable seeds are eaten by various creatures from birds to bears, who then carry the seeds within their digestive tracts to distant

locations, depositing them in impromptu dabs of fertilizer upon the ground. The plants are motivated to make more berries for purposes of seed dispersal, and animals are all too eager to offer seed-dispersal services. Animal redistribution of food plants has been happening since the beginning of time. When we humans move seeds from place to place (manually, mostly, rather than digestively these days) or engage in other acts of cultivation, we are recapitulating this ancient bargain between plants and animals. We also benefit from this bargain, as the many berry species in this book will attest.

Many of the edible plants in the Pacific Northwest are uniquely well adapted for natural disturbances. Returning to berry species such as trailing blackberry or salal, we see that these plants often lie below the forest canopy in small patches, waiting in latent anticipation for a change of circumstances. When wind or fires create holes in the forest canopy, these plants commonly burst forth with life and fruit, thriving and expanding into patches of newly available sunlight shining from above and the newly available soil nutrients from decomposing wood or charcoal below. Similarly, some of the best root foods, such as silverweed and springbank clover, live in shoreline environments, extending root-like tendrils out to occupy sediments freshly deposited or exposed by recent erosion. In the absence of natural disturbances, some of these plants might completely disappear from large swaths of the landscape.

Food plants of the alpine and subalpine mountains lie dormant for much of the year under shrouds of snow, bursting forth in great profusion later in summer than in lowland areas.

Native American plant propagation techniques in the region often served to mimic these natural disturbances—burning areas or churning the soil to produce habitat that favored these tasty but opportunistic plant species. Burning was used to clear areas, such as in the relatively dry interior lowlands of western Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia, but it could also be used cautiously in the understory of forests to improve plant food yields without harming the forest canopy above. Truly untouched wilderness seems to have been relatively rare, even within the region's ancient forests. When Native propagation ceased, in some instances the range of plants retracted significantly, with species such as camas and tarweed nearly disappearing from large portions of their former range. There are many obstacles to the continuation of traditional management. The vast, land-clearing fires used by many Northwestern tribes to encourage the production of camas, bracken fern, tarweed, and other food plants would prove breathtakingly unpopular among foresters, insurance agents, and civil authorities. If readers wish to encourage those species and habitats through the use of fire, special arrangements and agreements are advised.

Freshwater wetlands offer surprisingly good food-gathering opportunities, from the seeds of yellow pond-lily to the stalks of cattail.

Of course, in our culture and economy, wild lands tend to be either used intensively or preserved jealously. Neither is an especially good recipe for wild food plant abundance. Although many of the plants discussed in this book thrive with a little disturbance, they often struggle under the effects of intensive land uses, such as commercial agriculture and industrial forestry. It's true that natural and human disturbances have long been a part of Pacific Northwest environments, but only a public relations specialist might believe the often-made claim that sprawling and repeated clearcuts are our closest modern analogue to the dynamics of our historical forests. In such industrially managed forests, the removal of almost all standing trees tends to cause extreme changes in microclimate, exposing the ground to sometimes dramatic increases in temperature and sunlight almost instantaneously, only to plunge the ground into several years of nearly impenetrable shadow as young trees grow dog-hair dense on the replanted soil. So, too, herbicides are often used on clearcuts and their margins to reduce competition between young trees and other plant species. It is a rare organism that can survive and thrive amid these transitions, which are repeated on cycles of only a few decades. Industrially managed forests can

therefore be somewhat lean in their offerings of wild food plants, unless they are managed with unique care. In such industrial forests, the margins of protected stream buffers and other edge environments will offer some of the best pickings, but keep a wary eye for signs of recent herbicide use near or upstream from prospective wild harvest sites.

Where salt-tolerant meadow meets the forest, wild harvesting opportunities abound, from springbank clover, riceroot lily, and silverweed roots of the flats to the berries and shoots on the forest edge.

So, too, lands that have been protected strictly as wilderness or subject to long-term fire suppression often lack structural diversity, making them dense, shady, and lacking in many of the disturbances that guarantee good food plant harvests. Instead of industrial forestry or wilderness preservation, the imperative for good, diverse plant foods calls for an intermediate strategy, allowing for both modest disturbances and the retention of shady and relatively unblemished mature groves as an integral part of forest management. Not coincidentally, this may also be the best prescription for overall forest health. By advocating for these innovative methods of forest management, we might yet help the cause of advancing food plant abundance throughout the region. In addition, forest management that seeks to foster commercial harvests of nontimber forest products offers a

compelling alternative to the wood-centered model of forest management, although there are bound to be some Faustian details in any such bargain.

Another issue of critical concern to wild plant harvesters is the simple matter of access to these managed lands. Under most circumstances, harvesters should seek permission to gather on private lands; even on large timber tracts, a call to local offices is usually more effective as a first step than a call to an international corporate headquarters. Policies on public lands change over time, but the fundamentals are fairly consistent. On many American federal lands, such as U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management properties, gathering modest quantities of common plants for personal use is usually acceptable without permission. However, the gathering of anything in especially large quantities, of relatively rare species, or any commercial harvests must be undertaken only in consultation with agency staff, and usually only with a permit and a good explanation. The same is generally true of Canadian Crown lands. Inquire with the field offices that manage the tracts you might want to harvest. On state, provincial, and national park lands, plant gathering is usually very limited, with only a bit of berry, fruit, or nut picking by hand, in small quantities, for personal use being the standard. Anything more ambitious is sometimes grounds for fines and other forms of punishment and public humiliation. Wild plant enthusiasts have a stake in keeping lands open for harvesting, so behave discreetly and ethically for the common good. We will all benefit if you consider pitching in to ensure that plant gathering rights are not eroded and might even be expanded in suitable settings.

A few words of warning

Wild harvesting is an entertaining and nutritious pastime, but it should not be undertaken recklessly. You should never—absolutely never—eat anything that you do not clearly recognize as edible. Teachers of plant gathering skills have crafted an assortment of pithy phrases to express this cornerstone of wild plant harvesting: “When in doubt, throw it out.” “If a plant gets you confused, it should not be used.” “If you wonder, toss it asunder.” This makes for a fine word game during long hikes, however you

might choose to express it, but the fundamental fact remains: whenever in doubt, don't put anything you don't trust into your mouth.

Although this book contains abundant information on how to identify edible plants, it is not, strictly speaking, a plant identification guide. If you have any doubts about a plant's identity after consulting this book but still have a desire to try eating the plant, I recommend that you consult additional sources. There are several standard plant identification guides for the Pacific Northwest region, and some of them are listed in the recommended reading section. In addition, a simply absurd number of photos and descriptions of these plants is available online. With the common and scientific names of plants from this book at your disposal, there is no excuse for misidentification by anyone with an Internet connection. At the time of this writing, a Google search for images of common species yields literally thousands of photos, allowing a person to see a plant in every imaginable configuration and setting. Other good online sources include the U.S. Department of Agriculture's PLANTS website (plants.usda.gov) and the Plants for a Future website (pfaf.org), which provide additional photos, information on plant characteristics, and details on food and medicinal uses. If, after all of this searching, you are still not certain, please put the plant down and step away. And, if you are not prepared for the small risks that come along with the rewards of wild plant harvests, I might recommend that you put this book down and back away, too.

Some plant entries contain a short warning section, and you should heed these warnings. Several of the plants discussed in this guide are not entirely safe for human consumption without special processing or for any person who has special medical conditions. People who are likely to be especially sensitive—children, the elderly, pregnant or breastfeeding women, people who are immune-compromised for various reasons—should exercise particular caution. The warning sections in this book are especially, if not exclusively, for them. As a general rule, it is wise for people with special health concerns to avoid plants with bitter flavors, such as skunk cabbage and sweet coltsfoot, which often hints at the presence of alkaloids and other compounds that are mildly toxic, especially in large quantities. In the warning sections and elsewhere in the text, I have anticipated some of the

most common medical concerns. However, if you have any special medical concerns, I advise great caution, and perhaps the advice of a physician, before sampling any previously untried plants mentioned in this book.

In young spruce forests, spruce buds and sap provide the best options for harvesters, while sword fern, wild lily-of-the-valley, and an occasional salmonberry shoot emerge tentatively and diffusely on the forest floor.

Finally, although most places that a reasonable person would consider appropriate for wild food harvesting are safe, pollutants abound along roadsides, along ditches downstream from parking lots, and anywhere where herbicides and pesticides might be sprayed. Hydrocarbons, heavy metals, and myriad other pollutants sometimes find their way into the tissues of plants and, in turn, into us. Unless I am very hungry indeed, I seldom harvest plants beside busy streets or in places with any evidence of pollution or pesticide use. I advise that you consider doing the same.

Wild harvesting as discovery

One of the primary goals of this book is to encourage guided experimentation. Sure, we can learn what plants are edible, but that is just a starting point. Though both Native and non-Native communities have worked with many of the raw ingredients for millennia, the full culinary potential of the native plant palette has yet to be explored. New cooking methods, ingredients, and food combinations are still frontiers of a sort, awaiting exploration. I encourage you to be part of the process. In many instances, this book encourages readers to experiment with new recipes, to help develop a new cuisine, and share the results—a genuine call to action that I hope some readers will heed.

The entries in the pages that follow will give you some general guideposts as you embark on this quest. A wonderfully diverse range of berries is available for use fresh or in jams, baked goods, desserts, smoothies, and any number of other concoctions. There are greens in abundance for salads, cooked green mixes, soups, and the rest. Shoots—such as the delicate and sweet green shoots that grow from berry bushes in spring—lend themselves to use as fresh greens, in salads or soups, or to be steamed and eaten like asparagus. Although grains are not included in this book and are difficult for nonspecialists to identify, wild rye (*Elymus cinereus*) and Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*) are especially good, and the latter is gluten-free. Wild nuts are addressed here, such as hazelnut and chinquapin, with all of the rich, slightly oily flavor one associates with the nutty class.

Then there are the roots. They are typically bitter when raw and coated with dirt when we first encounter them. Unless we are especially adventurous or have inside information, there is little that makes us want to put these grubby, gnarled objects in our mouths. Yet when tidied up and prepared correctly, roots are often sweet, slightly earthy, and delicious. Many of the edible roots, such as camas, balsamroot, biscuitroot, and even thistle, contain an abundance of inulin, which is bitter and largely inedible when raw but converts to sweet, caramelized sugars when cooked slowly on low heat. The roots have flavors to match, reminiscent of sweet potato, chestnut, and other pleasantly familiar tastes. Get in touch with your roots, for they are perhaps the most undervalued wild edible in the Pacific Northwest.

Using this book as a starting point, see to it that the plants are no longer anonymous to you. If the Pacific Northwest is to be our home, then the lush wild vegetation of the region should not be an anonymous green tangle, but something well known to us, by name, by sight, by smell, by taste. As we pass through these landscapes, we should be fully awake, a traveler who takes deep and meaningful inventory as we pass "through sheep sorrel and clover, ghost fern and nettle … through bear-berry and salmonberry, blueberry and blackberry," as Ken Kesey intoned in the Pacific Northwest classic *Sometimes a Great Notion*. What's more, this inventory should make us hungry and eager to harvest. Ideally, it should sharpen our attention to the composition and condition of the region's wild habitats generally, making us a stakeholder in the verdant scene rather than just a tourist hastily passing through. Take children with you as you harvest, and explain to them what you are doing and why you are doing it. Let them have a taste, with a balanced explanation of the dangers and rewards. They will carry this knowledge forward for all of us, and this is a very good thing.

But first and foremost, you should go out and explore. Although I introduce you to these plants in the pages that follow, ultimately it is up to you to become acquainted with wild plants, to develop your own understandings of and relationships with these species. "Nobody can discover the world for somebody else," as Wendell Berry observed. "Only when we discover it for ourselves does it become common ground and a common bond and we cease to be alone." Get to know the cycles for yourself, all the sprouting, flowering, fruiting, and withering of those plants that might matter to you. Learn something from each plant in this book and treasure that new knowledge. Share that knowledge with the rest of us, too, so that we might all know a little more about this place and its rich potential.

The fact that you are using this book is a testament to your very good fortune: it suggests that you are living in the Pacific Northwest, interested in your surroundings, and probably mobile enough to explore. If you are indeed so fortunate, your exploration of culinary opportunities will be intertwined with a host of other discoveries about the plants and the habitats in which they dwell. A multifaceted adventure awaits you, one that can continue to educate, inspire, and feed you for years to come.

Wild Edibles Season by Season

Each year, the natural landscape and the plants within it go through cycles of awakening and dormancy that inevitably guide the food harvest. The exact timing of these cycles varies between elevations and latitudes, with most seasonal changes occurring later, and in more compressed timeframes, as one moves upslope or northward within the region. The timing of these cycles also changes along with our climate, so that winters are generally becoming shorter and spring arrives earlier than was the case a generation or two ago. Still, it is possible to outline general seasonal patterns that characterize the entire Northwestern region.

Harvesters should turn their attention to where the plant is turning its attention at each stage in this annual process. In spring, as plants awaken from their winter slumber and direct sugars and nutrients to their new leaves, flowers, and stems, you should also focus on these parts of the plants. At this time of the year, these parts will commonly be fresh, soft, sweet, pliable, and nutrient rich. These same processes continue into summer, but during this season plants turn their attention more directly to matters of reproduction. Summer is an excellent time to harvest berries, seeds, and nuts, as well as to continue the harvest of those leaves, flowers, and shoots that still appear and grow on many edible species. In the periods when the plant is directing its sugars and nutrients to underground parts of the plant, especially in autumn, roots will be sweeter and more nutrient rich, even as the rest of the plant withers in preparation for the dormancy period. In winter, edible plants of the Pacific Northwest are largely dormant, leaving harvesters looking for late-season berries such as evergreen huckleberry or greens

such as Siberian miner’s lettuce that seem to continue undeterred by winter’s chill.

Spring

Siberian miner’s lettuce.

Plant cycle Plants rebounding to life

General trends Plants direct nutrients and sugars to newly sprouting shoots, buds, and leaves.

Harvesting opportunities

Harvest edible berry shoots, such as those of blackberry, salmonberry, wild raspberry, and thimbleberry, while they are still new and springy.

Harvest other edible shoots, such as those of knotweed, cattail, thistle, devil’s club, and tule, as they appear and grow.

Harvest the new leaves and leaf buds that appear in great abundance on such species as wild mint, nettle, dock, fireweed, violets, stonecrop, plantain, lamb’s quarters, miner’s lettuce, oxalis, dandelion, and watercress.

Gather bulbs of edible lilies and camas before new leaves become large and firm, while the bulbs are still sweet.

Pick flowers for food or teas as they first appear, such as those of violet, chamomile, wild rose, elderberry, and yarrow.

Pick early-season berries, especially in late spring at lower elevations and latitudes, such as salmonberry and thimbleberry.

Plant any seeds retained through winter in the ground so that they may propagate in the year ahead.

Summer

Bog huckleberry.

Plant cycle Plants fruiting and growing

General trends Plant foods are abundant, with fruits, berries, and nuts.

Harvesting opportunities

Pick the tremendously abundant and diverse summer berries as they appear through the season, such as huckleberries, blackberries, salal, most currants, thimbleberries, wild raspberries, late-season salmonberries,

elderberries, Indian plums, Oregon grape, wild strawberries, chokecherries, and soapberries.

Gather the edible greens that continue to appear and grow through the season, such as nettle, wild mint, miner’s lettuce, sheep sorrel, chickweed, dandelion, cattail, and plantain.

Harvest flowers for use in foods or teas, such as violet, elderberry, chamomile, and wild rose.

Harvest edible shoots and stalks as they appear, such as cattail and horsetail.

Gather leaves of suitable plants for teas, such as wild rose, wild mint, chamomile, salmonberry, blackberry, and thimbleberry.

Harvest bulbs of lilies, camas, and wild onion, though palatability may improve into autumn.

Fall

Oak.

Plant cycle Plants becoming dormant

General trends Plants prepare for dormancy by directing nutrients and sugars to roots and other interior storage.

Harvesting opportunities

Harvest the abundance of edible roots that become sweeter in autumn, such as those of silverweed, springbank clover, lilies, wild onion, cattail, and dandelion.

Pick berries at higher elevations or latitudes, where many currants and huckleberries remain and are often sweet and numerous.

Pick late-season berries at lower elevations and latitudes, such as blackberry, currants, huckleberries, Oregon grape, and salal.

Gather late-season greens, such as miner’s lettuce, watercress, sheep sorrel, violets, mint, and fireweed.

If you wish to harvest roots in winter, mark areas where edible roots are growing, as the stems and leaves of these plants may be absent or scarcely visible by winter.

Stored seeds may be planted in the ground so that they propagate in the following spring.

Winter

Wild lily-of-the-valley berries.

Plant cycle Plants lying dormant

General trends Plant use is limited to roots and other interior parts, as well as the few greens and berries that remain on the plant well into this dormant season.

Harvesting opportunities

Gather remaining berries from the few species with long-lasting berries, such as evergreen huckleberry, wild lily-of-the-valley, high-bush

cranberry, and kinnikinnick, as well as rose hips that are still firm to the touch.

Seeds can also be harvested from ripe rose hips and sometimes from the standing dead stems of herbaceous plants such as dock and lamb’s quarters.

Gather what greens are available (usually at lower elevations) such as miner’s lettuce, evergreen violets, oxalis, chickweed, and sheep sorrel.

Roots can be gathered in winter, such as those of wild onion, camas, wapato, and cattail.

If you are truly starving, the juicy inner cambium bark of many conifer trees can be gathered at this time, but it does not peel readily from the tree in this season.

Enjoy the jams, preserves, dried berries, frozen foods, and other proceeds from the wild harvest that you have stored from more productive times of the year.

Wild Edible Plants of the Pacific Northwest

balsamroot

Balsamorhiza sagittata

arrowleaf balsamroot, Okanagan sunflower

EDIBLE roots, stems, leaves, seeds

Aboveground parts have a slightly bitter piney to citrusy flavor, whereas the roots are more subtly spicy and become sweet and especially tasty when cooked.

Balsamroot is an important plant of the drier Northwest interior. Every part of the plant is edible, including, most importantly, the roots. The stems and leaves have a slightly bitter piney to citrusy flavor, whereas the roots are more subtly spicy. The plant is of great importance to the interior tribes of the Northwest, who traditionally have consumed its roots in large quantities and used all parts of the plant for medicinal preparations of many kinds.

How to identify

Perennial with a base of large, arrowhead-shaped, silvery gray to pale olive green leaves covered with soft hairs. Solitary yellow flowers are borne up to 18 inches tall on a nearly leafless stalk.

Where and when to gather

Balsamroot grows especially well on the dry, exposed slopes of the interior Northwest, but it can be found west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges in sunny and often rocky places, especially those with a long history of regular fires. The roughly carrot-shaped taproots are best gathered in spring, when they are soft and flavorful, although autumn harvesting also works. Stems and leaves are best gathered when they are young and fresh, usually in spring and early summer. Seeds are typically gathered in late summer and autumn.

How to gather

The smaller balsamroot plants usually have the tastiest roots, whereas the older and larger plants' roots are big but tough. Dig up or loosen the soil gently around the plant, removing the large taproot from individual plants, while attempting to minimize disturbance to the roots of adjacent unharvested plants. Stems and leaves should be gathered while they are still young, springy, and very pliable.

How to eat

Roots can be eaten raw, but are most popular when peeled and cooked. The inulin in roots is converted to sweet and edible sugars as they cook; slow cooking over long periods usually yields the best results. Roasted roots have also been used as a coffee substitute similar to chicory. Seeds can be roasted and eaten in porridge or baked goods or ground into flour. Stems and leaf stalks can be eaten raw or cooked as greens.

Bright yellow flowers and arrowhead-shaped leaves of pale olive green mark the balsamroot, a tasty denizen of the Northwest’s rockier and drier regions.

Future harvests

Seeds gathered in autumn can be worked into the soil in suitable sites. Traditional Native American harvesting sometimes includes protective measures such as selective harvests and the cleaning of roots on site, so that unused root segments are returned to the soil. Balsamroot sometimes does not respond well to root disturbance, so propagation from root cuttings of live plants is not recommended without professional guidance.

Warnings

Many different plants have aster-like yellow flowers, and not all of them are edible. Bitter-tasting members of the genus *Arnica* are among these plants, and they can irritate you inside and out. Compare flowers and foliage carefully, and perhaps consider a cautiously small taste test if there is any uncertainty.

bigleaf maple

Acer macrophyllum

EDIBLE sap

Syrup made from the sap of bigleaf maple is a sweet departure from conventional Northeastern maple syrups.

Although few casual harvesters have ever experimented with this familiar Northwestern tree, the bigleaf maple is a worthwhile source of maple sugars and syrup. It is a large tree, with the largest leaves of any maple. The strong wood has much ornamental value and is popular with Native and non-Native woodworkers alike. The flavor of bigleaf maple syrup is sweet and still distinctively mapley, but making bigleaf maple syrup is no small feat, for (as with conventional syrups tapped from Northeastern maples) roughly 35 gallons (132 L) of sap are required to make a single gallon of syrup. The sap is tapped, strained, and evaporated using the same methods as used to make conventional maple syrups, and it is sure to become more popular as harvesters master the step-by-step process required for good syrup.

How to identify

A large deciduous tree that often grows to 80 feet tall. Leaves are five-lobed and very large, between 6 and 12 inches wide and almost as long. Bark is smooth and grayish brown on young stems, becoming reddish brown and deeply fissured and broken into scales on the surface with age.

Where and when to gather

Bigleaf maples are widespread in moist, mixed forests west of the Cascade Range and in southwestern British Columbia. The trees grow in gravelly damp soils, often on the margins of meadows or conifer forests, and especially along rivers, lakes, and streams. Bigleaf maple sap can be drawn through the winter months, from the time the leaves fall until spring buds begin to open. Sap in late winter is usually sweeter and easier to tap, and the

sap often flows best when the weather has abruptly warmed as a prelude to spring.

How to gather

Healthy-looking, medium-diameter trees with open crowns are best; avoid especially old or young trees within a grove. Although it is possible to simply score the outer bark to draw sap, the best results are obtained by boring a small hole 2 or 3 inches into the side of the tree, each hole at a slight angle so that the sap drains downward out of the tree. Typically, sap gatherers cap this hole so that sap stops flowing when not in use and the sap does not harden to seal the hole; commercially manufactured taps (known as stiles) are available for this purpose. Buckets, bottles, or other containers used to gather the sap can be placed directly below the hole, or tubing can be used to draw the sap to containers sitting on the ground.

The spreading, five-lobed leaves of bigleaf maple are the largest of any maple and the biggest leaves of any tree in our region. From spring to autumn, they turn from bright green to dark green to rusty oranges and browns.

How to eat

The raw sap is watery and can be used as a nutritious, faintly maple-flavored ingredient in beverages such as teas and coffees or as a base for soups, breads, and other foods. Many harvesters filter the sap first to eliminate any inert ingredients. To make syrup, fill and heat a container until the sap boils, adding more sap as the level in the container drops, skimming off foam and being careful not to let the sap burn or boil over. As the sap boils it will sweeten and thicken, so take samples, allowing it to cool and tasting until the sweetness seems right to you (66 to 68 percent sugar content is ideal). The syrup is often filtered afterward to remove crystalized sugars. Use just as you would any commercial maple syrups, on pancakes, cereals, or other foods.

Future harvests

Because sap harvesting is invasive, involving damage to the tree, practice this type of harvesting sparingly and with care. Trees that look like they are struggling or unhealthy should be avoided. Harvesters can revisit the same tree year after year without causing it much harm, tapping different sides of the tree each winter. Maple habitat is being encroached upon by development and by conifers that can overgrow entire maple groves in the absence of Native American burning and other disturbances. By protecting the trees' habitat, you can ensure future harvests. Volunteer saplings and helicopter-like seeds can be planted in damp but sunny spots; these maples are often available from nurseries, too.

Broadleaf trees

left: The outer bark of paper birch peels off in white sheets, causing astonishingly little harm to the tree. **center:** Serrated, roughly oval leaves with pointed tips extend out from red alder's flexible green stems. **right:** The smooth leaves of black cottonwood protrude in circles from central, sweet-smelling resinous buds.

The broadleaf, deciduous trees of our region also have their culinary appeal. Some of these trees have fruits, such as the black hawthorn, chokecherry, or mountain ash. Some of them have nuts, such as the oaks or chinquapin. Yet even the trees without edible fruits and nuts have something to offer.

Paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*) is found in the colder northern and interior portions of the Pacific Northwest, with its white peely-papery bark, sharply pointed leaves, and dense short catkins. This and other native birches have sap that can be used as syrup or gum. Especially in Europe, birch sap has a long history of use as a nutritious low-glycemic sweetener, and its use is on the rebound as people around the world look for healthy sugar substitutes. Birch sap also lends a distinctive flavor to beverages such as sodas and wines.

Some broadleaf trees also have an edible cambium layer, the soft inner bark lying just on top of the wood. Red alder (*Alnus rubra*), for example, is a source of cambium that grows on streambanks and disturbed sites, mostly from the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges westward. The trees have bright green leaves that are oval but toothed, little brown cones, and a white-gray outer bark that thinly conceals a brilliantly orange-red interior. Red alder cambium can be a little bitter and is sometimes sweetened by modern harvesters. Other species of alder can be found in the region, and these are also passable cambium sources. Cambium is ideally peeled in spring, as the sap begins to flow in the tree, allowing it to be easily removed and lending it additional sweetness and nutritional value.

The cambium of black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*) can also be gathered to good effect. This tree grows especially on the banks of streams and other waterways, with sweet-smelling resinous buds, heart-shaped leaves, and long dangling catkins. The cambium of black cottonwood is extraordinarily sweet but it does not store well, getting fermented and funky in less than a season’s time.

biscuitroot

Lomatium species

EDIBLE roots, stems, leaves, seeds

Spicy little roots become sweet when cooked, and greens and seeds have a celery-like flavor.

Biscuitroot is a common name for a group of plants of the genus *Lomatium* that grow especially well in the interior Northwest. These ankle- to knee-high plants have lacy foliage—reminiscent of the plants' carrot and parsley relatives—and clusters of little yellow flowers perched in circular patterns on short umbel stems. The spicy little roots, with shapes ranging from radish to carrot, become sweet when cooked and have long been a staple to interior tribes. The greens and seeds have a celery-like flavor and are popular cooked or fresh. The plant is also used medicinally by tribes both east and west of the Cascade Range. At the close of winter in sagebrush country, biscuitroot is among the first to dot the ground with green, but by summer the plant tends to go brown and dormant, making this plant a very good spring food.

How to identify

Robust perennial herb with several hollow stems up to 3 feet tall that arise from thick, irregularly shaped taproots. Fern-like leaves are finely dissected and most cluster around the base of the plant. Tiny yellow to deep purple flowers are borne on long stalks in umbrella-shaped clusters about 4 inches across and give way to oblong seeds with flattened backs and broad wings.

Biscuitroot is a spindly little plant, with stem-borne whorls of yellow flowers. The plant’s appearance hints at its kinship with carrots and parsley.

Where and when to gather

Biscuitroot grows especially well on the meadows and exposed slopes of the interior Northwest, but it can be found west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges in drier interior valleys. The taproots are best gathered in spring, when they are soft and flavorful, but they can be harvested in autumn as well. Stems and leaves are best harvested when they are young and fresh, usually in spring, whereas seeds are commonly gathered in late summer.

How to gather

Although flavors and textures vary, the smaller biscuitroot plants often have tastier roots. Dig up or loosen the soil gently around the plant, removing the large taproot from individual plants, while attempting to minimize disturbance to the roots of adjacent unharvested plants. Leaves should be picked early in the season, not long after they appear. Seed capsules can be

picked when they become brown; if they are opening of their own accord, the plants can be shaken to release the seed. Check greens and seeds for their telltale celery scent to be sure you have the right plant.

How to eat

When cooked, the inulin in roots is converted to sweet and edible sugars. As with most such plants, slow cooking at low temperatures generally brings the best outcomes. The nutrient-rich greens of biscuitroot can be eaten raw or cooked. The seeds, when roasted, lend a celery spiciness to teas, soups, and other foods. There are many different species of *Lomatium*, so some experimentation with different plants is warranted.

Future harvests

Seeds gathered in late summer can be worked into the soil in suitable sites. Traditional Native American harvesting often involves selective harvests and the cleaning of roots on site, so that unused root segments are returned to the soil.

Warnings

A few poisonous plants of the region bear a vague resemblance to biscuitroot. Although they generally grow in different kinds of places, this should be kept in mind when identifying *Lomatium*. These poisonous plants include poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) and water hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*), both of which bear white flowers. If you aren’t certain of the identity of the plants you are considering as food, just walk away.

black hawthorn

Crataegus douglasii

EDIBLE fruits

Fresh hawthorn fruits lend some welcome tartness and color to sauces, vinegar mixtures, and beverages.

In moist meadows and thickets throughout the region, this small tree stands with its heavily thorned branches, deeply toothed leaves, and white flowers that transform each summer into an abundance of dark red to blackish purple fruits that look like tiny apples. The hawthorn fruit is okay—tart and fruity, but also dry and seedy. It tastes fine fresh, but is more often cooked into jams and other concoctions. Fruits stay on the tree long after they are overripe; these then ferment and intoxicate fruit-eating birds, who swoop and careen on reckless hawthorn benders.

How to identify

Small deciduous tree, 20 to 30 feet tall, with an arcing crown of spreading branches, or thicket shrub. Rough, scaly bark is gray, but new growth is reddish brown. Plant is clothed in leathery, thick, deeply serrated leaves and sharp thorns up to 1 inch long. Dense clusters of stinky, cherry blossom–like white flowers develop into purplish black apple-shaped fruits about ½ inch in diameter.

Deep reddish purple-black hawthorn fruits sit perched atop stiff stems, girded by upright serrated leaves.

Where and when to gather

Black hawthorn grows well throughout most of the region west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, especially in damp clearings and thicket margins. The fruits become ripe in summer.

How to gather

Pick the fruits that are big, deep red, and fleshy but firm. Make certain that the fruits are not overripe by tasting a few. If they taste fermented or are exceedingly squishy or brown, they should probably be avoided.

How to eat

Some harvesters enjoy the fresh fruits, although they are a bit tart and dry for some tastes and may cause mild digestive distress in large quantities. The fruit lends some welcome tartness and color to sauces, vinegar

mixtures, and beverages. Hawthorn is especially popular in jams and jellies. Be prepared to remove the large, hard seeds.

Future harvests

Replant seeds obtained through food processing. Volunteer seedlings can often be found near the base of trees, or scattered in a wide radius that corresponds with the flight paths of myriad loopy birds.

black huckleberry

Vaccinium membranaceum

mountain huckleberry

EDIBLE berries

These are some of the tastiest berries to be found in the Pacific Northwest.

Of all the huckleberries in the Pacific Northwest, black huckleberry may be the most eminently harvestable, often forming sprawling mountaintop patches of deliciously sweet berries. These look much like other huckleberries, with fruits that resemble blueberries (reddish purple to black). With the delicate use of fire and the casting of berries to the ground in first fruit ceremonies of thanksgiving, Native peoples have maintained impressively productive berry patches in open thickets and under otherwise natural forest canopies throughout the Cascade Range, a traditional management skill that might still allow Northwesterners to eat huckleberries to our hearts' content. In certain patches, a berry bucket can be filled in a few minutes' time with some of the tastiest berries to be found in the region.

Looking and tasting like wild blueberries, black huckleberry grows abundantly in the clearings and understories of mountain forests.

Black huckleberry grows abundantly in some mountain settings, filling the pockets, buckets, and pies of harvesters with red to purplish black berries.

How to identify

A deciduous, densely branched woody shrub up to 6 feet tall, with thin oval to lance-shaped leaves, finely toothed along the edges and lighter underneath, turning crimson to deep purple in autumn. Small, lantern-shaped flowers are greenish yellow to pale pink and turn into purplish or reddish black berries.

Where and when to gather

Black huckleberry is best gathered in mid-summer to early autumn in the high-elevation forests of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, as well as on the Olympic Peninsula and Vancouver Island. The best places are those that have been burned in the past, either as a result of natural fires or Native American burning.

How to gather

Like other huckleberries, black huckleberries are easily picked one by one, although berry rakes can be used. These huckleberries are so numerous in some patches that harvesters sometimes tie buckets or other containers to their bodies so that their hands are free to pick quickly and unencumbered.

How to eat

Outstanding as a dessert berry, succulent, and seldom in need of sweeteners. Black huckleberry jams and pies will not disappoint.

Future harvests

Recently burned lands present an excellent opportunity for huckleberry propagation; take a cue from Native American tradition, and scatter berries in these areas. If you encounter an extensive and well-established berry patch in the vicinity of a modern Native American community, you can bet this is a place that is utilized extensively and valued quite highly, not only as a food source, but as a manifestation of a generation-after-generation relationship with this plant community. Be respectful of the people, their ancestors, and their linkages to this plant, and harvest lightly (if at all) in such settings.

black lichen

Bryoria fremontii

wila, tree hair lichen, edible horsehair

EDIBLE entire lichen

Black lichen is blandly nutty and readily absorbs the flavors of foods with which it is cooked.

Hanging like shocks of thinning dark hair from the branches of conifers, black lichen hardly looks like your usual native plant food. Tasting blandly nutty and, admittedly, just a little soapy, this lichen is used raw or in porridge and breads. Black lichen is traditionally pit roasted and has been hugely important to the diet of Native Americans from the interior Northwest, serving as an everyday delicacy as well as an easily gathered year-round food for lean times.

How to identify

Dark reddish brown to gray to black, with stiff and wiry (or soft and limp, when wet) filaments 4 inches to 2 feet long that hang from conifer branches. The main filaments are thicker (over 0.02 inches wide), flattened, and greatly entangled and give rise to shorter, more slender side branches.

Where and when to gather

Black lichen can be gathered in conifer forests throughout the region, but the drier interior and montane forests have the most edible specimens. In coastal areas, much of the black lichen will be bitter and mildly toxic in large quantities. Gathering can occur throughout the year.

With tangled tendrils of dark gray to black, black lichen droops down from conifer branches in Northwestern forests.

How to gather

Black lichen can be gathered by hand, but often its height presents challenges. Native Americans traditionally use long sticks that are raised into the tree and twirled to collect the lichen. Taste and inspect the lichen carefully when gathering to be sure that it is black lichen. The best clues are color and taste: if it is not especially dark or has any noticeable bitterness to the taste, avoid the lichen and move on. Clean the lichen well, as it tends to be full of sticks and debris; repeat washings can also cleanse away any bitter and toxic vulpinic acid.

How to eat

Lichen is traditionally pit roasted or boiled into a somewhat nutty-tasting but bland porridge; usually it is sweetened or mixed with other ingredients

for sweetness and textural diversity. The lichen absorbs the flavors of foods with which it is cooked; for example, it is traditionally cooked with berries to make a berry-flavored porridge. The lichen can also be used in breads and other baked goods, and when pulverized it can be used as a leavening agent.

Future harvests

Gather sparingly in any one location. There has been some success in the transplantation of black lichen by simply hanging strands securely in otherwise unoccupied trees.

Warnings

Black lichen should only be consumed when its fibers are dark in color, though colors may vary from brown to gray to black. Yellow-colored black lichen does exist, but it is usually rich in vulpinic acid, which is a good source of yellow dye, but also a toxin. Be very sure that what you are gathering is black lichen and not an impostor. Mildly bitter black lichen can be rinsed repeatedly to remove the small quantities of vulpinic acid until it is palatable.

bog cranberry and lingonberry

Vaccinium oxycoccus (bog cranberry)

Vaccinium vitis-idaea (lingonberry, low-bush cranberry)

EDIBLE berries

Though tart, these native cranberries can be eaten raw or dried as a snack.

These very similar plants are the region's two true native cranberries. Though small and relatively uncommon over much of the Pacific Northwest, they are a fine stand-in for commercially grown cranberries, with bright red or pink color and a surprisingly familiar cranberry flavor. Creeping through sphagnum moss, bog cranberry stands alone, with tiny leathery leaves and berries of up to ½ inch in diameter balanced improbably on the ends of their stalks. Further to the north, lingonberries speckle the mossy bogs and hummocks with similar red berries, in clusters of two, three, or more on each stem's terminal end.

How to identify

Evergreen dwarf shrublets with small, sparse, leathery leaves and pink flowers that look like tiny shooting stars. Berries are pink to crimson and, though small, seem to be too large for the diminutive creeping plants.

Tiny pink bog cranberries dot the sphagnum moss in marshy places throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Bright red lingonberry orbs cling to diminutive stems with shiny leaves. The berries’ appearance hints at their familiar cranberry flavor.

Where and when to gather

Bog cranberry can be gathered in sphagnum bogs in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. The lingonberry is more common from British Columbia to Alaska in bogs, forests, and tundra. Berries ripen in late summer, generally, but timing varies considerably between sites.

How to gather

These berries are somewhat delicate and grow diffusely in fragile habitats, so tread gently and be thankful for the few berries that you find. Bog cranberries are best picked one by one. The somewhat more productive and durable lingonberry can be stripped by raking hands through the low foliage, removing several berries at once.

How to eat

Though tart, these native cranberries can be eaten raw or dried. They are probably more popular when cooked and lightly sweetened, similar to their commercially available and domesticated kin.

Future harvests

First, do no harm. The habitats of these native cranberries can be fragile, so step lightly, and perhaps be an advocate for the protection of delicate and rare sphagnum bog communities. Seed propagation works well in suitable habitats; rooted cuttings are also commonly successful where groundwater and soils permit.

bog huckleberry

Vaccinium uliginosum

EDIBLE berries

The bog huckleberry is one of the sweetest, tastiest little berries to be found.

Bog huckleberry is very commonly overlooked because it is a knee-high bush with small berries, living inconspicuously along bog margins. This is unfortunate, as bog huckleberry is one of the sweetest berries in the region. For generations, wise harvesters have made summertime treks to mountain lakes and bogs to gather these berries. Traditionally treasured by Native American peoples, this plant was simply called “sweet berry” in some Northwestern languages and was mixed with other berries to add flavor and sweetness.

How to identify

Small, deciduous, matting shrub growing up to 3 feet tall, with brown stems and oval, bluish green leaves. Pendulous, pale pink, urn-shaped flowers produce deep blue to bluish black berries.

Bog huckleberry grows in swampy settings, and the plant’s small woody stems are adorned with bright blue berries.

Where and when to gather

The bog huckleberry grows especially well on the peaty margins of lakes, ponds, marshes, and muskegs. In the Pacific Northwest, most patches are in mountain settings, edging the lakes of the Cascade Range, for example, where the berries ripen during the summer months and into early autumn.

How to gather

Berries can be picked and eaten one by one. Larger berries are usually the ripest and sweetest, but not always.

How to eat

Bog huckleberries are excellent on their own or mixed with other berries, fruit, cereals, or baked goods. With some willpower, they can also be frozen, canned, or dried and saved for later use.

Future harvests

Because bog huckleberry is sometimes located in small and isolated patches, be careful not to overharvest. Scattering some berries in suitable wetland-margin habitats and working into the soil might help spread the range of this plant, a worthwhile mission.

bracken fern

Pteridium aquilinum

brake, fiddlehead

EDIBLE fiddleheads, shoots, roots

A juicy treat with hints of licorice, tender fiddleheads can be eaten raw, but they are also commonly steamed or roasted.

Many Northwesterners recognize the characteristic single-stalked fiddleheads of bracken fern. Popping up from the ground each year, a green stalk with curlicue tips standing in vaguely adolescent awkwardness, fuzzy and solitary, the plant quickly transforms into an elegantly lacy and symmetrical fern that can range from knee- to head-high depending on opportunities afforded by its environment. Widespread in the region—and indeed throughout large portions of the Northern Hemisphere—bracken fern is a prized food plant on no fewer than three continents.

If foragers move fast enough, they can capture a few tender fiddleheads early in the growing season, a juicy treat with hints of licorice, before the stems harden and the fronds unfurl. More intrepid harvesters may attempt to reconstruct a time-honored but largely lost Native American tradition of roasting the thick rhizomes and grinding them into flour. Biscuits made from this flour were prized trade goods among some tribes and often presented to visiting ships in the early nineteenth century. To foster the growth of bracken and other food plants, Native peoples burned clearings on the forest margin, creating fern prairies that were often mentioned in explorers' accounts and among the first places reoccupied by Euro-American settlers in the otherwise forested portions of the Northwest. Though these fern prairies are largely overrun by farms, towns, and cities today, bracken fern is still widespread, largely untended, sometimes becoming almost invasive on disturbed ground, but providing ample opportunities for harvest.

During bracken fern’s fiddlehead stage, the fuzzy knuckles thrust skyward and the stalks are soft, pliable, and sweet.

How to identify

The triangular fronds of this large, deciduous fern are carried on a thick central stalk. Each frond is composed of ten or more pairs of feathery leaflets arranged symmetrically along the sturdy branched stalk. Spores are carried on the underside of the leaf in linear structures.

Where and when to gather

Bracken fern grows in diverse settings, from wet forests to seasonally dry prairies. However, the best patches are typically found in moist but well-drained ground with at least moderate sunlight: forest clearings in the

Cascades and both American and Canadian Coast Ranges are a good bet. Seasonality varies, but fiddleheads are gathered as the plant presents itself in the spring and early summer. Rhizome digging is possible in spring, as fiddleheads first appear, or at the end of the growing season, when bracken fronds turn brown and collapse to the ground.

How to gather

New fiddlehead shoots are soft and pliant, so fingers are all that is needed. The younger the shoots the more tender they will be. As the fern's fronds begin to open, the stalk quickly becomes hard and largely inedible. Rhizomes can be gathered by digging away the soil at the base of the stalk with a shovel, rake, or pitchfork, and taking what appears to be the thickest live root segments within a few inches of the plant. Dead and old woody rhizomes are common, so find those that are springy but firm with living tissues.

Widespread on disturbed sites throughout the Northwest, bright green bracken fern is known by its lacy compound fronds.

How to eat

Tender fiddleheads can be eaten raw, but they are also commonly steamed or roasted like asparagus. The soft fuzz on the exterior of the stalks can be removed by hand, brush, or cloth with a final rinse. Few specifics have been recorded about the traditional roasting, grinding, and baking of fern root flour, and I have only limited experience in the matter. Please do consider experimenting with this process, and share your results with the rest of us.

Future harvests

Within small patches of bracken, which are common, selective harvesting is best to avoid localized extirpation. Bracken fern formerly thrived on burned forest clearings and understory, but burning is seldom advised without written permission from landowners, firefighters, and insurers. Spores can be gathered from plants when mature brown spore capsules appear on the underside of lacy fern foliage and dispersed to the soil. Transplantation of rhizome segments is also possible. Cut a long live section of rhizome and place in a suitable spot, watering heavily in the first season.

Warnings

Some sources correctly note that bracken fern contains carcinogenic compounds, though it is unclear whether you are putting your life on the line with the small levels of exposure encountered by most fiddlehead harvesters.

bunchberry

Cornus canadensis

dwarf dogwood, dwarf cornel

EDIBLE berries

The berries are good fresh and are sometimes mixed with other berries to good effect.

With an attractive four-petaled white flower and deep-veined leaves, this ankle-high dogwood looks very much like its larger ornamental cousins of the same genus. Each summer and autumn, the distinctive dogwood flower gives way to a small cluster of bright red berries that are sweet, if a little mealy and seedy. Few beautifully ornamental groundcovers are also edible, so bunchberry deserves greater attention as both a wild food source and as an addition to native plant gardens throughout the Pacific Northwest.

How to identify

A slender, erect perennial herb, 4 to 8 inches tall, with a whorl of four to seven leaves. Leaves are delicately pointed, mostly evergreen and oval, with well-defined parallel veins. Carried above the leaves on a short stalk is a single blossom of four white petals (sometimes with tints of pink, purple, green, or yellow) around a central clump. The flowers develop into compact clusters of brilliant red berries.

Carpeting the ground with dogwood flowers, bunchberry is not only a useful food plant but an appealing groundcover.

Showy white bunchberry flowers give way to inviting clusters of bright red berries.

Where and when to gather

Bunchberry grows on moist forest floors and in bogs, soils rich in organic matter, or on downed and rotting wood, usually where it is dappled in sunlight. Though large patches can be found, the species' distribution is often diffuse, reflecting the role of birds in its seed dispersal. Berries ripen in summer and into autumn.

How to gather

Pick berries one by one, focusing on the larger and softer berries.

How to eat

The berries are good fresh, though a bit mealy, and are sometimes mixed with other berries to good effect. They can also be cooked in jams and other

concoctions or dried for later use. The seeds are large and hard, though, and the flesh of the berry clings to them tenaciously, so a food mill or other device may be desired for large-scale processing.

Future harvests

Where bunchberry grows in small or isolated patches, harvest selectively or return seeds to the ground on site. Seeds can be readily transported and reseeded in places with conditions similar to those of the maternal patch—shady spots, usually, with moist humus-rich soil. If the maternal patch is large and robust, plants can be transplanted. Include a respectable length of the underground rhizome, and tuck the remainder gently and respectfully back into place.

burdock

Arctium species

EDIBLE roots, shoots

The root can be eaten fresh or cooked in soups and vegetable dishes.

With bristling curved burrs that cling to socks and dogs and other loved ones, burdock is well known to many Northwesterners. Although this ingenious seed-spreading strategy carried the plant here from its native Eurasia and inspired the invention of Velcro, in the Northwest it has not inspired much eating. And this simply won’t do. Burdock root makes a good cooked vegetable with an earthy flavor that is popular in Asian cuisine and herbal medicines.

Prickly burrs adorn medium-sized stalks, giving burdock its characteristic look and name.

How to identify

During this biennial herb’s first year, it is composed of a low-growing clump of large leaves. In its second year, as it bolts, burdock can grow to be a 6-foot-tall, mostly unbranched plant. The stout stems are light green to reddish, and the 2-inch-long lance-shaped leaves are paler on their wooly undersides. Clusters of bristly flower heads, pink or purple, emerge on short stalks, resembling the flower of thistles, with narrow hooked tips. These spiny-looking flowers form brown seed-carrying burrs.

Where and when to gather

Burdock seeks out disturbed, open ground, such as roadsides, vacant lots, and untended gardens. The root can be gathered in the first year of the

plant’s life, ideally in spring or autumn. New shoots and leaves can be gathered in spring.

How to gather

Shoots and leaves can be plucked from the larger plant, and the long, thin taproot is harvested by digging up the entire plant.

How to eat

Burdock root can be eaten fresh, but it can be bitter. The root is generally better cooked, in soups, vegetable dishes, and other recipes in which earthy roots seem welcome. Soaking scored or peeled roots in water prior to cooking can help reduce bitterness. Japanese and Korean cuisine has many burdock recipes, and pickled burdock root makes frequent appearances in sushi. Burdock shoots can be eaten as a green before the flowers fully develop. Burdock leaves are edible, technically, but a lot of cooking and earnest personal conviction are required to make them palatable.

Future harvests

Burdock is invasive. Like any cling-on alien menace, it should not be encouraged. Harvesters sometimes inadvertently propagate new plants by carrying burrs or rootlets to new places. Only propagate burdock with caution.

camas

Camassia leichtlinii (great camas)

Camassia quamash (blue camas, Indian hyacinth, quamash)

EDIBLE bulbs

With a flavor and texture that remind some harvesters of sweet potato, camas root makes a very tasty side dish and is good in pies.

Once draping entire prairies in brilliant springtime blue, camas has long reshaped the landscape and history of the Northwest. Camas is a beautiful flowering lily with a delicious edible bulb. When raw, these bulbs are white and filled with a largely indigestible starchy substance called inulin. When cooked, however, the inulin is transformed to brown, sweetly digestible sugars, and the bulbs have flavors that are often compared to baked pears, figs, potatoes, or sweet potatoes. Camas bulbs are among the most important traditional plant foods for Native Americans of the Northwest, who used to care for these plants by burning off competing vegetation, selectively harvesting, occasionally transplanting, and employing many other techniques. The scuttling of prized camas patches by arriving settlers and their livestock sparked wars and near-wars. In time, settlers learned of the plants' virtues and harvested camas for their own pies and side dishes. Many prized gathering areas disappeared long ago due to development and the prohibitions on traditional burning, but there has been a recent rebound in interest in restoring camas among many modern Northwesterners, Native and non-Native alike. The showy purple-to-blue spring flower has made camas an increasingly popular ornamental that is featured in bulb catalogues. By restoring camas to its central place in the regional flora, we are at once filling our world with fine flowers, good food, and objects of great cultural and historical interest. What more could a native plant harvester hope for?

How to identify

Perennial with grass-like leaves that emerge from a deep-seated bulb. The 1-inch-wide star-shaped flowers range from pale to deep blue or white and form a cluster on a stout stem up to 2 feet tall. With age, the flowers' six slender petal segments spread, twist, and fall and are replaced with dry, three-lobed capsules of black fruit packed with seeds.

Where and when to gather

Camas is surprisingly difficult to find in many of its historical haunts, but still appears in undisturbed wet (but well-drained) sites both east and west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges. The bulbs are best gathered in late spring and early summer, when the plant is no longer in bloom and the bulbs are soft and sweet.

The brilliant blue flowers of camas are distinctive and popular with gardeners.

How to gather

Dig up the bulbs carefully, prying back the sod to reveal all of the bulbs immediately underfoot. Selectively harvest the larger ones, leaving the rest to see another season. Clean the bulbs of any stems and other materials, ideally at the harvest site so that bulblets and other materials return to the soil.

How to eat

Peel off the outer, dirty layer to reveal the inner white bulb. Camas bulbs should be cooked until they transform from white and opaque to brown and somewhat translucent, indicating carmelization and the transformation of inulin to sugars. Generally, the longer you cook, the sweeter they become. Slow steaming or roasting are traditional cooking methods. Camas is very tasty as a side dish, in pies, and in other recipes where a flavor and texture resembling sweet potato might make sense. The bulbs have also been boiled to produce beverages and thick sauces, ideas worthy of some experimentation.

Future harvests

Gather selectively, taking only the larger bulbs and leaving the rest. Care for the plants' shrinking habitat by weeding invasive species, maintaining clearings, and being a general camas advocate. Fire was used by Native Americans throughout the region to enhance camas patches, but their residual habitat is often close to settlements and harvesters are well advised to act on any pyro-horticultural impulses with tremendous caution. Harvesters can, however, transport both bulbs (which will separate and proliferate in time) and seeds (which germinate nicely) to suitable places, ideally in autumn.

Camas often grows densely in meadows, with its short-lived flower stalks briefly revealing the location of the tasty bulbs below.

Warnings

Although camas bulbs are quite flavorful in autumn, they are relatively difficult to find or to differentiate from death camas (*Zigadenus venenosus*), which is found in regrettably similar habitats and sometimes grows among camas patches. Death camas tends to flower later in the season than camas (which blooms in spring), with tight clusters of numerous white flowers (in sharp contrast to the typical camas blue). Consumption of small quantities

of this plant will make you uncomfortable, but consumption of large quantities will make you dead. Native peoples used to carefully flag death camas and try to remove it from areas used for camas harvest. If you are not able to identify the stalk and flower of camas prior to, or concurrent with, the harvest, then camas patches should be avoided.

cattail

Typha latifolia

EDIBLE leaves, stems, rhizomes, pollen, seeds

The green flower heads can be cooked and eaten like corn on the cob.

Almost everyone will recognize cattail growing in marshes throughout the Northwest, with its signature look of tall stalks topped with fuzzy brown cylinders and flanked by long blade-shaped leaves. This common marsh plant is as ubiquitous as it is useful. With edible leaves, stems, rhizomes, seeds, and pollen, the plant deserves the attention of all Northwestern harvesters. Archaeological evidence suggests the food use of cattail for millennia by ancient Europeans, North Americans, and others. Almost worldwide use of cattail is reported, and it is one of the only plants with a long history of pollen consumption. The long leaf blades and stems are also a staple of traditional basketry and crafts, so by all means play a little with your food.

How to identify

Perennial water plant with long, narrow leaves that sheath the 4- to 10-foot stems topped with a thick, dark brown flowering spike. The upper portion of this spike carries the pollen-bearing flowers that gradually fall apart, leaving the top of the stalk bare. Thick, club-shaped, seed-producing flowers on the lower portion last until late summer, when they crumble into fluffy seed puffs.

Standing tall in marshes and along lake margins, cattail has a distinctive look, with long, flat green leaves and brown cylindrical flower clusters atop tough stalks.

Early in the growing season, pollen can be gathered from the fuzzy flowering tops of cattail stalks.

Where and when to gather

Cattails thrive in damp places, in marshes, ditches, and other wetlands worldwide. For foraging purposes, it is best to find patches in relatively unpolluted waters, and roadside ditches or sewage treatment outfalls should be avoided. Fresh, young leaf shoots can be gathered as they emerge from the muck in spring. The flowering stem can be gathered in the early summer, and pollen collection is best done as male flowers emerge soon

thereafter. Rhizomes can be gathered year-round, but are an especially good winter food.

How to gather

Some harvesters simply pull up the plant and eat it. Alternatively, one may gently dig around the base of cattail to find the lateral rhizomes, root-like lateral stems growing below the ground surface. Dig or pull rhizomes up, and cut at the intersection with the plant. Fresh green leaves can be cut from the base of the plant, whereas stems should be picked and peeled to expose the soft white stem segments and green flower head inside. Place the male flower in a bag and shake vigorously to collect the yellow pollen grains, and discard the rest. Seeds can be gathered by collecting or stripping the brown female flower, which resembles a cat’s tail.

How to eat

Well-washed rhizomes can be roasted or scraped to produce flour that can be eaten alone or in recipes. Pollen also functions as a sort of flour that can be used in baking, cereals, and porridges. Fresh leaves are good raw or cooked. The green flower heads can be cooked and eaten like corn on the cob. The white inner stem, especially from the lower portion of young plants, is good fresh or cooked and can be eaten as a vegetable, ground into flour, or boiled into a kind of syrup. To use stems, just peel off the outer leafy sheath. Female flowers can be pulled apart, and the resulting debris is charred to remove the brown fluff and parch the seeds for use in soups and cereals, or as flour.

Future harvests

Cattail can be transplanted reasonably well by excavating an intact rhizome section and replanting in matching habitat. Seeds from the brown female flower can be scattered on marshy sites to help establish cattail in new places.

Warnings

Occasionally cattail grows near patches of iris (*Iris* species), which are not edible and may look similar during springtime cattail leaf gathering. Species can be easily differentiated by their leaves (iris leaves are commonly veined, whereas cattail leaves are not), their stems (iris stems are flattened ovals, whereas cattail stems are round), and the dead stalks of either plant from the previous year sitting immediately nearby.

chickweed

Stellaria media

EDIBLE leaves, stems, flowers

Fresh leaves, stems, and flowers lend a bright, early-spring flavor to salads.

This fresh and sweet-tasting green is very popular with wild plant harvesters. Chickweed is a welcome addition to salads or can be gently cooked. As the name suggests, the plant is popular with chickens and other livestock, and it is partly through its tendency to occupy agricultural lands that this species made its journey to the Americas from its native Eurasia. Today, chickweed forms matted little semi-succulent groundcovers on the weedy margins of Northwestern fields and gardens. Get familiar with the general look of chickweed and you will be assured of free and easy food harvests whether you travel in the cities or the countryside of the Pacific Northwest.

A delicate little plant with white flowers, chickweed creeps through the Northwest’s damp and grassy places.

How to identify

Matting annual that trails on the ground, with thin but succulent stems up to 16 inches long. The stems branch freely and root along the ground. Leaves are smooth and oval, with a point on the tip, set on short stalks arranged on opposite sides of the stem with a line of fine hairs rotating up its sides. Small white flowers perch alone or in small clusters on the end of the stems. Each flower has five petals with such deep indentations on their tips that it looks like ten. The subsequent little oblong fruits have lots of tiny seeds.

Where and when to gather

Thriving on disturbed, open ground, chickweed lives near people and their settlements. The plant is well suited to colder weather than we typically see west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, so greens can be harvested in late winter, though in truth fresh growth can be gathered at any time of the year as it appears on the plant.

How to gather

Pick entire sections of the plant, as all parts are edible. Focus on recent growth, as those sections that have not yet started to fully flower are often the sweetest and most delicate. Experiment broadly, because variations in chickweed make some patches very palatable and others less so.

How to eat

The fresh leaves, stems, and flowers of chickweed lend a bright, early-spring flavor to salads. When cooked, chickweed works well in soups, green mixes, and the like. Because the plant is delicate, cooking should be brief. Dried chickweed also works well as a tea ingredient, a greenish food dye, and a seasoning.

Future harvests

This plant is invasive and considered a weed in many circles. Avoid propagating in wild settings, but true chickweed enthusiasts might attempt to grow this plant in controlled garden settings.

chicory

Cichorium species

EDIBLE roots, leaves

Roasted roots, with their chocolate and coffee flavors, are used as a coffee substitute.

Standing tall by the side of the road, chicory is a common backdrop to our daily travels. Light blue, long-petaled flowers with toothy petal tips sit atop hard, almost woody stalks, which are adorned with vaguely dandelion-like leaves. This plant is another semi-invasive European expatriate, escaped from cultivation here and in many other colonized parts of the globe. This plant's roasted roots, with their chocolate and coffee flavors, are used as a coffee substitute worldwide. The spicy and slightly bitter leaves are also widely used as a salad green in European cuisine, and the fresh leaf buds are prized by some cooks as chicons, an endive-like head of unsprouted leaves.

How to identify

A bushy perennial, up to 3 feet tall, with blue, purple, or white flowers about 1 inch in diameter that are carried singly or in clusters on a branched, upright stem. Lower stems are often quite hairy, with upper stems smoother. Lance-shaped leaves are rougher and hairier toward the base of the plant and have irregularly serrated edges.

Where and when to gather

Chicory is found widely throughout the region, especially on disturbed ground, heavily grazed fields, roadsides, parking lots, and other places subject to abuse and neglect. Chicon harvesting usually occurs soon before the leaves sprout in very late winter and early spring. Leaf harvesting is best in spring, when leaves are still fresh. Root harvest timing varies but often occurs in late summer or early autumn, when the plant begins to die back.

How to gather

Chicon harvesting from cultivated chicory is a complex business, and those interested should read up on the practice first. Wild chicon harvesting can be done by hand or with a small knife to separate the buds from the rootstalk as they appear. Leaves can be picked one by one early in the growing season. The large roots can be dug from the ground.

The showy blue flowers of chicory atop spindly stalks light up fields and roadsides, announcing opportunities for food gathering.

How to eat

Chicory leaves are usually eaten fresh in salads, but can also be a spicy addition to cooked greens. Chicons are commonly steamed, but can be seared, stir fried, or cooked in myriad ways to add sharp notes to certain foods. The roots are ordinarily air dried, roasted, and then ground or shredded; roasted chicory root is often used just like ground coffee or as an

additive to ground coffee, and it is increasingly being used in beer and other beverages.

Future harvests

As a semi-invasive European weed, chicory probably does not need encouragement. If you choose to cultivate chicory, this can be done by transplanting; just be certain that your cultivated patches are contained so that neither seeds nor root fragments can travel to occupy new places and freshly disturbed lands.

chinquapin

Chrysolepis chrysophylla

EDIBLE nuts

The small nut has a sweet and subtly spicy flavor, reminiscent of chestnut.

Chinquapin is an underappreciated contribution to the region's limited native nut supply. Spiky burrs conceal small nuts with a sweet and subtly spicy flavor, reminiscent of chestnut or beech nuts, chinquapin's distant relatives. Growing in robust thickets in the drier Northwestern forests, chinquapin is quick to reoccupy recently burned lands, its nuts being distributed broadly across the freshly exposed earth by enthusiastic birds and squirrels. Recognizing chinquapin's fondness for burned ground, some Native American communities of the region often ignited competing vegetation to keep their larders full of this small, sweet nut.

How to identify

An evergreen broadleaf shrub or tree, sometimes growing up to 80 feet tall, with leathery lance-shaped leaves, dark green above and scaly golden reddish below. White flowers are carried in upright spikes and are followed by spiny burrs holding one or two nuts.

Clusters of spikes gird the husk of the chinquapin nut.

Chinquapin’s oblong leaves are smooth, shiny, and dark green above but golden and scaly below.

Where and when to gather

Chinquapin is especially fond of rain-shadow forests and chaparral with well-drained soil and a history of occasional fires. The southern Oregon coast range is especially good chinquapin country, as are many of the drier, interior parts of western Oregon and Washington. Nuts mature by autumn and can be gathered into wintertime. They are not always abundant and appear irregularly, so some searching may be required to find productive patches.

How to gather

Gently pull nuts from the shrub or tree. When ripe, nuts can be shaken from trees or judiciously gathered where they fall around tree bases. Larger nuts are generally better.

How to eat

Peel the husks by hand if loose. Fingernails usually suffice, but a knife, carefully wielded, will ensure access to any nut.

Future harvests

Tucking a few nuts into the soil in suitable habitats near harvest sites can help maintain productive patches. Scattering nuts may yield a few new plants.

chokecherry

Prunus virginiana

bitter cherry

EDIBLE fruits

Best when cooked, sweetened, and mixed with other fruits.

As the name suggests, this is a wild relative of domesticated cherries, with the familiar brilliantly red fruit. Unlike its domesticated kin, however, chokecherry fruit is bitter, and without sweetening many mere mortals will find it hard to swallow. Still, the cherries are tasty when processed and provide ample food for birds and other wildlife. By mid-summer, dense bunches of the red fruits dot shrubby trees, with a distinctively thin reddish brown bark, sometimes scaly, with white to gray streaks running in horizontal bands. The bark, when peeled, is rubbery but strong and has served Native Americans like a durable rubber band. The roots, bark, and leaves have myriad medicinal uses. Its coastal relative *Prunus emarginata*, also commonly called bitter cherry, has a fruit that is similar in appearance but even more bitter, making it inedible to all but the most intrepid foragers.

Brilliant red fruits dot chokecherry trees, drawing the attention of birds, quadrupeds, and a few intrepid wild harvesters.

Like their domesticated cousins, some chokecherry fruits trend toward darker colors, looking almost black in some settings.

How to identify

Perennial shrub or small tree, roughly 15 feet high and sometimes taller, with horizontally banded bark and broad, oval leaves, 1 to 3 inches long, that are rounded or heart-shaped at the base. Leaves are a bit hairy and finely toothed. Clusters of small white flowers with yellow centers become bright red fruits.

Where and when to gather

Throughout the region, chokecherry grows close to streams or other moist places that have been disturbed in recent decades. They are best picked in mid to late summer, with fruits ripening somewhat more slowly in the high country.

How to gather

Easily picked like any other small fruit. If entire fruit clusters are ripe, you can pick them in a single swipe of the hand. The fruits darken with age, becoming a deep, dark red that indicates a growing sugar content and greater palatability. Underripe, bright red fruits should be avoided.

How to eat

Best when cooked, sweetened, and mixed with other fruits, the chokecherry is popular in jams and pies. Only a few unique individuals can eat the cherry as a raw table fruit.

Future harvests

The characteristic cherry pit is easy to gather and redistribute, ideally in autumn. The plant’s willingness to grow in disturbed sites, and its appeal to birds and other wildlife, makes it an excellent candidate for restoration projects in moist forests, as long as livestock are not present.

Warnings

Do not eat underripe chokecherries, as they are mildly toxic until they begin to darken in mid to late summer. Chokecherry can be unpalatable, and even poisonous, to certain domesticated animals, such as cattle, goats, and horses, as well as wild quadrupeds such as elk and deer, due to moderate cyanide content in foliage, which often becomes more concentrated once the leaves have wilted or been exposed to frost.

coastal black currant

Ribes divaricatum

coastal black gooseberry, spreading gooseberry

EDIBLE berries

Tart and tangy berries are good fresh, but can also be cooked for jams and sauces.

With stout, thorny, arched branches suspending soft maple-like leaves and attractive flowers, coastal black currant hoists its offering of juicy berries through the tangle of coastal forests and thickets. Coastal black currant is a popular berry, tart and tangy, at times tasting like a slightly underripe purple grape. The berries are smooth-skinned and bluish purple to black, growing in clusters on this scraggly little bush. Found especially in moist sites, on wet rocky slopes, and on rotting wood, this plant can form small thickets. Especially when cared for, coastal black currant can be an attractive plant and is sometimes planted in ornamental gardens to good effect.

How to identify

Perennial shrub with arching stems that carry stout spines at each branch node and some leaf nodes. Leaves are deciduous, widely heart-shaped, about 2 inches across, and hairy on the underside. The delicate flowers, looking like diminutive fuchsia blossoms, have small red to purple petals around a white center. Flowers hang in clusters of three to five under leaves and develop into shiny black berries.

Purplish and translucent with a brown beak, coastal black currants dot the thickets of coastal forests with sweet opportunity.

Currants and gooseberries

The uses of currants and gooseberries are scintillatingly diverse. They are eaten as fresh berries, but are also used in jams and jellies, juices and other beverages, pastries, pies, cakes, ice cream, soups, chutney, salads, as garnishes, in cereals, and in any number of other settings where one might seek a tart berry.

Currants and gooseberries are all members of *Ribes*, a genus consisting of about 150 wild species. Roughly 25 species are native to the Pacific Northwest, and several of these deserve harvesters' attention, including the golden or buffalo currant, red-flowering currant, and wax currant.

The berries have flavors that are vaguely reminiscent of grapes, crisp and acidic, but with added complexities.

Despite their shared kinship, the flavors and colors of Northwestern currants and gooseberries vary considerably from species to species. Flavors also vary a lot between individuals of the same species, so broad experimentation is worthwhile. Most are sweet when ripe, but with an earthy, floral, or tart quality. In some cases, the earthiness or tartness can make the berry hard to swallow. Berry colors range from red to purple to black to golden white and green. The fruits are always oval to round, sporting a little brown beak of residual flower parts on their bottom end. Some (mostly gooseberries) have soft little prickles on their fruits, whereas others (mostly currants) are smooth. Most have soft flesh when ripe but with a little seedy crunch and a firm skin that seems just a bit too snug for the fruit, which has some pop to it when bitten.

Currant and gooseberry plants tend to live near waterways or in other moist but well-drained sites. (Wax currant, however, thrives in rocky slopes, old lava flows, and harsh mountain soils, often in the full glare of mountaintop sun.) These plants are perennial bushes, up to 8 feet high, or sometimes creeping vines, with woody stems and deciduous leaves. Branches may or may not be armed with prickles, and leaves may or may not be covered with sticky hairs. Leaves are mostly three- to five-lobed and have a strong and distinctive scent when crushed—some pleasantly reminiscent of berries, some reminiscent of nastier things. Almost all currants sport maple-like leaves, generally with five main symmetrical lobes and little serrated teeth. The various small blossoms, drooping or erect clusters of reddish pink, white, golden, or green, are very popular with summertime hummingbirds and gardeners alike.

All currants and gooseberries respond well to planting of seeds or entire berries in suitable sites. Many generate runners that develop roots independently and can be cut from the plant and transplanted as well. They deserve a place in gardens, in forests, and in the ever-diversifying palette of Northwestern cuisine.

The sweet berries of golden currant (*Ribes aureum*) range from golden yellow to deep reddish orange, and foliage emits a vanilla-clove scent, making this plant popular wherever it is found in the drier, eastern parts of the region.

In time, the brilliant red and pink flowers of red-flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) shrivel and develop into long, oval berries of subdued hues.

The tube-shaped pink flowers of wax currant (Ribes cereum) transform in time to bright reddish orange berries, clustered together on densely packed stalks.

Where and when to gather

Coastal black currant is locally common in shady thickets and damp forests, particularly within the coastal zone. Berries ripen through summer, with timing varying depending on latitude, elevation, and sunlight.

How to gather

Berries can be picked one by one or in handfuls. Ripe berries are often plump and very slightly softer than unripe berries of similar size.

How to eat

The berry of coastal black currant is especially good fresh, but can also be cooked for jams, sauces, and many other uses. Berries or berry juice can be added to beverages to provide depth of color and flavor.

Future harvests

Fling extra berries when passing through places with good growing conditions, similar to those of the maternal patch. Spit seeds strategically from berries eaten fresh. Uncooked berries from food processing may be planted at suitable sites, too. The arching canes of coastal black currant often develop roots when they touch the ground, and rooted canes can sometimes be cut from the plant and replanted elsewhere.

Warnings

When eaten in large quantities, some wild currants have a mild laxative quality.

coltsfoot

Petasites species

sweet coltsfoot, palmate coltsfoot, arrow-leaved coltsfoot

EDIBLE leaves, stems, flower stalks

Leaves are comparable to chard or spinach.

Popping up through the moist earth in very early spring, with flower stalks preceding leaves by days or weeks, coltsfoot is one of the first indications that the foraging season has begun. In the Pacific Northwest, harvesters may encounter the large hand-shaped leaves of palmate coltsfoot (*Petasites frigidus* var. *palmatus*), sweet coltsfoot (*P. frigidus* var. *frigidus*), and arrow-leaved coltsfoot (*P. sagittatus*). A useful early spring plant, the leaves of all three provide a serviceable cooking green, while newly sprouted stems can be eaten in a variety of ways. The plant is also highly popular as a medicinal herb.

How to identify

Perennial with numerous stems in which 12-inch-tall flower stalks develop before the very large, deeply divided leaves with undersides covered with wooly fuzz. Upright flower stalks bear a white to whitish pink cluster of flowers that suggests the form of soft, spineless thistles.

The flower stalks of palmate coltsfoot rise high above the hand-shaped leaves, raising an explosion of little white tufts above the forest floor.

Where and when to gather

Coltsfoot is happiest in moist but often well-drained soils with dappled shade, and it also does well in disturbed sites. Together, this ensures that coltsfoot is abundant in the wetter parts of the Northwest, in ditches and along roads, in addition to lining marshes and streambanks. The plant's distinctive flower stalks appear in very late winter or early spring; gathering is generally best early in the season, as stalks and new leaves present themselves.

How to gather

Pick fresh stems as they emerge from the ground, and pluck fresh leaves as they appear in spring.

How to eat

Leaves serve as a respectable cooked green, comparable to chard or spinach. The freshly developed stems and flower stalks can be boiled, roasted, or even chopped into pieces and stir fried. Salt substitutes are sometimes made by rolling the leaves into balls, drying them, and charring them into a powder.

Future harvests

Coltsfoot grows in slowly expanding colonies, and small individual plants can be divided and taken to new locations, especially when they go dormant in autumn. Seeds are sometimes gathered and scattered to good effect. In the right setting, coltsfoot has the potential to be invasive.

Sweet coltsfoot is at its best when the leaves first emerge from the earth, tender and sweet, unfurling atop fresh green stalks.

Warnings

Due to mildly toxic alkaloid compounds in this plant, the consumption of large quantities can cause liver complications. Only modest consumption is recommended. Pregnant women should avoid this plant altogether.

common plantain

Plantago major

broadleaf plantain

EDIBLE leaves, seeds

The young leaves are good fresh in salads or cooked, and the small seeds can be roasted or parched.

Among the most common driveway weeds, the common plantain is familiar even to those Northwesterners who might usually pass unnoticing through the landscape. With its deeply veined leaves and green central spike with minuscule flowers, this Eurasian plant grows in damaged lands everywhere, it seems, gladly occupying places laid bare by human occupation. The plant arrived early in North America, reputedly gaining the name “white man’s footprint” in some Northeastern Native languages as it followed in the colonists’ wake. The plant is not only astonishingly widespread, but its leaves are also a highly nutritious green, making common plantain one of the best sources of free food in the Northern Hemisphere.

Common plantain has heavily veined oval leaves and long, red-to-green flower stalks. This species often dots roadsides and other disturbed ground.

How to identify

Stout perennial with wide leaves at a basal tuft and one or more long flower spikes. Leaves have numerous parallel veins and are widely oval, 2 to 7 inches long, and often pointed at the end. A spike of small white flowers that fade to brown seed pods is carried atop a stalk up to 20 inches tall.

Where and when to gather

A widespread invasive weed that has unique advantages on compact soils, common plantain is found throughout the region on disturbed ground, especially roadsides, driveways, lawns, flower gardens, and other places where treatment of the land has been a bit heavy-handed. If leaves are to be eaten raw, they should be gathered primarily in spring or early summer. As the season progresses, the texture and flavor of plantain leaves gets tougher and hairier, but the plant can still serve as a cooked green later in the season. Seed gathering is sometimes attempted in summer and autumn.

Common in sandy and disturbed areas, many other edible plantains have lance-shaped leaves with thick veins and dark flower heads protruding on stalks.

How to gather

Pick leaves from the central stalk. Seeds can be stripped from their stalks by hand.

How to eat

The leaves are good when young and fresh and are suitable for salads. Plantain also makes a passable (but sometimes flavorless) cooked green and it is used in soups and cooked green mixes. The nutritional value of plantain is often quite high, providing vitamin A, calcium, and other nutrients in abundance, but this varies depending on growing conditions and locations. The seeds are very small and gathering yields small quantities, but they can be roasted or parched and used to add bulk to seed mixtures for porridges and baked goods.

Future harvests

There is little point in trying to cultivate common plantain. As long as people continue to create compacted and biologically simplified gaps in the landscape, plantain will be available in abundance.

cow parsnip

Heracleum lanatum

EDIBLE stems, shoots

The inner stalk is mild, sometimes sweet, and tastes like celery.

Looking like Queen Anne’s lace on steroids, cow parsnip stands tall through the summer months. The thick, ribbed, hollow central stalks are crowned with large white umbrella-shaped flower clusters. When peeled with caution to avoid severe skin blistering, these stalks are a tasty addition to the diet, so popular in Native American tradition that the entire plant is commonly called Indian celery.

Flat-topped clusters of white flowers sit atop cow parsnip’s lanky and edible hollow stalks.

How to identify

Very large, erect herbaceous perennial ranging from 3 to almost 10 feet in height, with stout, hollow stems and hairy, deeply dissected leaves that range in size from well over 1 foot wide at the base to roughly 6 inches wide nearer the tips. Leaves vaguely resemble those of maples, sharply serrated and lobed. White flowers form a flat-topped umbrella shape and develop into dry, brown seed pods.

In coastal settings, cow parsnip grows small and compact, so take a second and careful look to rule out other seaside plants with similar flowers.

Where and when to gather

Cow parsnip is found widely in the Northwest and thrives in moist, sunny to partially shaded places, such as in meadows or along roadsides and riverbanks. The stalks develop and are most palatable in spring.

How to gather

Gather with caution, because the juices of cow parsnip's outer tissues contain phototoxic compounds. When these juices make contact with skin and the skin is exposed to ultraviolet light (such as in sunlight), these compounds cause the skin to discolor or even blister. In some cases, blistering can be severe. Always use gloves when handling the plant. Break or cut the newly developed central stalks near their base and secure away from skin. Peel the outer layer of the stalk and dispose of it carefully, then wash the interior stalk thoroughly before using.

How to eat

Although the foliage and exterior skin of cow parsnip are pungent smelling, the inner stalk is mild, sometimes sweet, and tastes like celery. The stalks are popular fresh, but can also be cooked and used in similar applications as celery.

Future harvests

The big, umbrella-shaped flowers transform into big, umbrella-shaped clusters of seeds through summer and autumn. These seeds can be gathered and scattered where appropriate in winter.

Warnings

The juices of this plant can cause severe blistering if not handled carefully. Also, be certain that you are gathering the right plant. There are much smaller plants with similarly shaped and colored flowers that are poisonous, such as poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*). These plants do not have the large, hollow stalks of cow parsnip but can be confused by inexperienced harvesters. If unsure, avoid this plant altogether.

crabapple

Malus fusca

EDIBLE fruits

Crabapples are generally quite tart and are popular in preserves.

In wet places, one finds thickets of this small tree, dappled with clusters of miniature apples. Although tart, these crabapples resemble their domesticated apple relatives in taste and texture. Native American communities traditionally gather crabapples in large quantities, keeping them in water or oil in large boxes until they are soft and eating the fruits or drinking their juice at ceremonial feasts or other social events. Some Native communities had carefully tended crabapple orchards. In places where trees were tended for generations, there are patches of especially large and sweet crabapples that may, with further testing, prove to be proto-domesticated varieties.

How to identify

Small, slender tree, up to 40 feet tall, with thorny spurs and fissured bark. Deciduous oval leaves are saw-toothed. Fragrant white to pink five-petaled blossoms form in small clusters and produce small oblong green apple fruits that turn yellow or reddish.

Where and when to gather

Individually or in dense thickets, crabapple lives comfortably in moist places: on riverbanks, near marshes, or in dense shrubby coastal forests. Fruits are borne in summer. Often, the later you gather, the more likely you are to find sweet fruits, so that some people prefer to gather late-season crabapples in autumn.

Crabapples are slightly bitter equivalents of their domesticated kin.

The five-petaled white flowers of crabapple resemble those of domesticated apples and their close relatives cherries.

How to gather

Crabapples can be picked individually, but they tend to come off the tree in clusters. Generally, the larger and more colorful the apple, the more ripe it is. After a frost, the apples become brown, soft, and often sweeter.

How to eat

Crabapples are generally quite tart, though occasionally harvesters find a particular tree that produces slightly sweeter fruit, much as with the ancestors of the domesticated apple. Some people eat crabapples fresh, but they are also popular cooked in jams, jellies, and other foods that allow for some added sweetener.

Where crabapple trees have been tended by Native peoples, these little fruits can become a staple plant food.

Future harvests

It is possible to gather seeds from crabapples. Compost left over after making crabapple jam, for example, can be strategically placed to foster new groves. Barring this, toss a few crabapples into a suitable spot.

dandelion

Taraxacum species

EDIBLE leaves, roots, flowers

Leaves are commonly used fresh in salads or added to soups.

As European peoples historically galloped around the globe, this familiar plant usually followed close behind. Dandelions are uniquely adapted to the disturbed sites that colonists always seemed to leave in their wake. This plant is wildly successful, dotting the landscape with its bright yellow flowers and long, deeply serrated, dark green leaves. Although usually considered a pest by gardeners, harvesters should appreciate the many uses of this common plant.

Among the most familiar weeds, yet often underappreciated, dandelions hoist brilliant yellow sunburst flowers skyward, flanked by edible serrated lion-tooth leaves.

How to identify

Perennial herb composed of many oblong, toothed leaves clustered at the base. Bright yellow flower heads are carried singly above the leaves on thickened stalks and give way to white, puffy seed heads.

Where and when to gather

Dandelions can be gathered wherever they present themselves, in gardens, fields, or right in your own backyard. Just be certain to avoid those specimens that have been sprayed, rooted in contaminated soil, or otherwise exposed to untoward chemical experiments. Spring and summer are the times of peak abundance, but this hardy plant sometimes appears at surprising times and places.

How to gather

Leaves may be picked directly from the plant, or the entire plant may be plucked from the ground. Harvesters who pull the entire plant up will certainly be greeted as heroes by a certain segment of Northwestern society.

How to eat

The leaves are commonly used fresh in salads or added to soups. The intensely bitter flavor of dandelion leaves is often unpalatable by itself, though some harvesters can tolerate eating the leaves unadorned. Younger leaves from early in the growing season or shaded and wet patches are often less bitter. The leaves are best when mixed with other foods that complement or mask the bitterness, such as oil, vinegar, butter, or sweeteners. Greens can also be placed on a low boil and the water changed a few times to reduce bitterness. The roots, when scraped clean and roasted, are a common element in herbal teas and—like the leaves—are reported to have detoxifying effects. In wines, dandelion flowers (and less commonly leaves) can give an interesting bite.

Future harvests

Dandelion probably doesn’t need much help from the likes of us. If you propagate dandelion (and it takes kindly to propagation), do so in a way that seed dispersal is contained.

devil’s club

Oplopanax horridus

EDIBLE leaf buds, stem shoots, roots

The fresh leaf buds and new stem segments are spicy and sometimes compared to pine, citrus, or ginseng tea.

Nothing else in the Northwestern forest is quite like devil’s club. The spines not only can poke the skin, but irritate it with their unique oils. It hardly looks like something you would want to stick in your mouth. Yet the fresh leaf buds and springy new stem segments appear each spring and are, for only a few days, one of the tastiest things to be found in the forest. A ginseng relative, devil’s club has a flavor that is hard to describe: spicy and sometimes compared to pine, citrus, or ginseng tea. Roots can also be eaten (though the berries cannot, except maybe by bears).

True to its heritage, devil’s club is also a powerful medicinal plant and is of spiritual importance to many Native American communities. Recent studies confirmed its adaptogenic and anti-inflammatory properties and its potential for fighting diabetes, tuberculosis, and other diseases. The entire plant looks forbidding up close, but it has an ornamental quality from a distance, with brilliant green leaves juxtaposed against bright red clusters of berries. Though brush-grasping hikers and fisherfolk may fear an inadvertent handful of spines from this plant, its many virtues cannot be ignored.

How to identify

A lanky, deciduous shrub, 3 to 12 feet tall, with very large leaves. Slender, crooked, and tangled stems are densely armored along their entire length with long, stiff thorns. The leaves, with seven to nine deep lobes each, are sharply pointed and toothed along their edges and form a flat tuft at the top of the stems. Leaves are also armed with thorns along their veins, both above and beneath. Pyramid clusters of tiny greenish white flowers crown

the top of the main stems and transform into clusters of small, flattened, scarlet berries.

Where and when to gather

Devil’s club is found in moist but well-drained sites, such as in damp forest clearings, along streams, and in wet scree slopes. Most of the food harvesting occurs in spring, as winter dormancy ends and new leaves, shoots, and rootlets present themselves.

Among the spiniest plants to be found in the region’s forests, devil’s club raises flat, maple-like leaves on spiky stalks, which are topped by conical clusters of small red berries.

How to gather

Snap or cut off fresh stem and leaf buds as they emerge from the ends and nodes of stems. Pick shoots of perhaps 1 to 5 inches in length—much longer than this and they begin to get hard and prickly. But assess springiness as you go, recognizing that your goal is to enjoy devil’s club without ingesting a stiff and spiny mouthful. Roots are easiest to gather

along streambanks, where they are exposed or hidden just below the surface and can be cut using a knife, clippers, or trowel.

How to eat

Although devil’s club can be eaten raw, most enthusiasts eat it cooked, with myriad recipes reflecting personal proclivities. Devil’s club shoots can be fried with onions or garlic as a side dish, steamed like asparagus, added to stir fries, or stirred into scrambled eggs, just to name a few possibilities. Shoots can be peeled if they are too fuzzy or spiny for comfort. Young spikes can also be singed off of the shoot prior to cooking. Roots are mostly used medicinally, but when shredded or cut into small pieces they can be used as a powerful seasoning in stir fries and vegetable dishes.

Future harvests

Devil’s club grows slowly and often in small patches, so use this plant sparingly. Harvest selectively, too, leaving on each plant several stalks with ample new shoots so that the plant can survive robustly through the year ahead. The ripe berries can be gathered and redistributed to suitable habitats. Cuttings can be gathered and placed in water or wet ground to develop roots before being planted at their final destination. Also useful are layering techniques, involving the partial burial of stalks of a living plant, which then take root and can be cut from the plant for transport elsewhere.

dock

Rumex crispus (curly dock)

Rumex occidentalis (western dock)

EDIBLE leaves, fruits, seeds

The tender young leaves make tasty cooked greens with hints of apple, lemon, and rhubarb.

Many species of dock can be found in the Northwest, some native and some not, almost all of them edible. Of these, curly dock and western dock are the most palatable and widespread. The tender young leaves make tasty cooked greens, just a bit tart with an oxalic acid bite that can give the leaves hints of apple, lemon, and rhubarb. The greens are also nutritious, with a vitamin A content that would put a carrot to shame. Many harvesters instantly recognize the stalk-borne clusters of little winged fruits and seeds, pointing skyward from the leafy plant below.

With its oversized green leaves, often speckled in red, and its red to green stems, dock is a common resident of grasslands and wetland margins throughout the Northwest.

How to identify

Perennial up to 3 feet and little branched, except where the flowers develop. Leaves are green but often with red tones, broad, and oblong to lance-shaped, with curled or crisped edges. Green to red stems sometimes resemble thin rhubarb stalks. Flowering stalk is round, hairless, and ribbed and carries loose clusters of numerous greenish to brown inconspicuous flowers.

Where and when to gather

Widespread throughout the region, especially in wet meadows, roadsides, and other cleared areas, perhaps even in your yard. The leaves can be eaten at various times, but the young early-season leaves are definitely more palatable.

How to gather

Pick leaves from their joint with the larger stalk, or entire plants can be gathered from large patches and greens later separated from their stalks. A few intrepid harvesters gather the minuscule fruits to eat in summer, or grind the seeds into flour in autumn, but this takes real dedication.

How to eat

Greens can be used fresh in salads, but they are generally best when cooked briefly. Myriad dock recipes are available from cookbooks and blogs involving sautéing, boiling, and other cooking techniques; the leaves are often mixed with other greens, vegetables, meats, and lots and lots of garlic. The oxalic acid bite of the leaves can be reduced by boiling briefly, replacing the water and boiling again, in one or more rotations. Fruits and seeds can be eaten raw, parched, or otherwise cooked and used in porridges or baked items as a constituent of a multi-ingredient flour.

Future harvests

Curly dock is invasive, so natural propagation is probably not advised. Native docks propagate well from seed, but do your homework to make sure you are not helping the cause of alien invaders.

Warnings

As is true of any plant containing oxalic acid, dock may upset the stomach when eaten in large quantities and can exacerbate problems with kidney stones for those who are predisposed.

eelgrass

Zostera marina

EDIBLE leaf blades, seeds

Crisp and grassy sweet, eelgrass tastes something like the raw hijiki that is the foundation of Japanese seaweed salad.

Vast beds of eelgrass swirl in shallow tidal waters like dancing fields of grass in the wind. This fast-growing plant is tremendously important yet underappreciated by most Northwesterners, often ignored among the beachside flotsam and perpetual underwater tumble of seaweeds. A former land plant that took to the sea countless generations ago, eelgrass is a cornerstone of shallow coastal ecosystems, providing food and hiding places for a rich abundance of marine plants and animals. Lesser known is that the leaf blades of eelgrass—flat, ribbon-shaped, and translucent green—are edible, as are the stems at the base of each blade, and even the rhizomes creeping laterally below the underwater sediments. When harvested, eelgrass proves to be crisp and grassy sweet, tasting something like the raw hijiki that is the foundation of Japanese seaweed salad. The seeds have food value, too, traditionally used by some Native peoples to produce a porridge or bread, with a nutritional profile similar to conventional grains. With so much food value, some have proposed eelgrass be recruited as a crop plant for arid coastlines, because it is fast growing and needs no irrigation to survive. In time, if we care well for our nearshore waters, it is not hard to imagine a rich eelgrass-based cuisine taking root in the maritime Northwest.

Long translucent green ribbons of eelgrass sway upright in shallow saltwater, but they are commonly found tumbled after storms, tossed along the shore with thick roots intact.

How to identify

Submerged saltwater perennial that grows in clumps, with narrow, buoyant, ribbon leaf blades up to 3 feet long. Tiny flowers arranged in rows on the flowering spike develop into seed pod bladders.

Where and when to gather

Eelgrass grows in estuarine settings and in shallow, slow-moving saltwater inlets. Avoid areas with high potential for waterborne pollution. Freshly grown eelgrass segments, gathered in spring, are usually best. Seeds can be collected in late summer or autumn.

How to gather

Native American harvesters traditionally gather eelgrass by hand from canoes at low tide or use special sticks to twirl in eelgrass patches, pulling the tangled bunches to the surface. Eelgrass is sometimes dislodged by storms, though the quality of the material that washes to shore cannot be guaranteed. Many living things like to cling to the surface of eelgrass—from epiphytic seaweeds to small crustaceans—so clean thoroughly unless you are seeking a fairly complex and crunchy dining experience.

How to eat

Eelgrass is traditionally rolled in balls and dipped in condiment oil or formed into cakes and dried. Growing experimentation with seaweed salad–inspired concoctions seems to have promise. Toasted and ground seeds have been made into porridge by some Mexican Native peoples and eaten with honey or other toppings. Flour made from the seeds can also be used to produce bread-like dumplings. There are not many reports of experimentation with seeds, so please do share your discoveries.

Future harvests

As with other estuarine species, the principal threat to the productivity of eelgrass is the filling and pollution of tidal lands. Working to protect the integrity of these habitats may be the greatest priority for those aiming to promote the well-being of eelgrass. Rhizome segments from eelgrass, acquired intentionally or not during harvest or washed ashore by storms, reproduce readily on bare (but submerged) sediments at suitable sites. Seed propagation must be done with particular care, so that seeds are not eaten or washed away by water currents.

elderberry

Sambucus cerulea (blue elderberry)

Sambucus racemosa (red elderberry)

EDIBLE berries, flowers

The flavor of blue elderberries is sweet, complex, and pungent, making them popular fresh or in wines and liqueurs. Red elderberries are pungent without the sweetness.

In the Pacific Northwest, there are two especially widespread elderberries: red and blue. The two plants are quite similar in structure, with long lance-shaped leaves on opposite sides of each stem, perched on the ends of brittle and pith-centered stalks that can grow to modest tree height over the course of several years. Large clusters of minuscule white springtime flowers give way to similarly large clusters of small berries—somewhat pyramidal clusters in the red elderberry and somewhat flat clusters in the blue. Blue elderberries may look grayish due to a thin white waxy coating. Their flavor is sweet, complex, and pungent, making them popular fresh or in wines and liqueurs, pies, jellies, and myriad other recipes. Red elderberries are pungent without the sweetness. Native peoples have eaten them cooked for generations, but today red elderberries have only a very small following. The small white flowers are also sometimes gathered for use in teas and other beverages, and they can be cooked into various foods, imparting their flowery fragrance to anything they contact.

Clusters of deep red elderberries perch on upright stalks, drawing birds and occasional wild harvesters into the plant’s leafy green maze.

Elderberries are also widely respected for their medicinal properties and are included even in staid and mainstream commercial herbal remedies. Be forewarned that most parts of these plants are traditionally used as dye, including berries (red and blue), leaves (green), and charred roots (black). I find that a shirt worn while picking elderberries may never look quite the same.

How to identify

A deciduous tree or large shrub composed of warty-barked, pith-centered branches, 5 to 20 feet tall, with compound leaves made up of five to seven lance-shaped, serrated leaves. Flat or dome-shaped clusters of white flowers develop into bunches of small blue or red berries.

Where and when to gather

Red elderberries are more common on the coast and in moist lowland forests, whereas blue elderberries usually (but not always) occupy drier interior forests and those of higher elevations. Their close relative, black elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*), with its deep purple berries, grows in environments roughly similar to those of blue elderberry and can be used in similar ways. Elderberries begin to blossom in spring and present berries through summer, often with red elderberry appearing by mid-summer and blue elderberry by late summer, but with considerable variation based on elevation, location, aspect, and other factors. Slightly soft berries are generally ripe berries. Later season berries are often better, but birds tend to pick the plants clean long before berries become overripe.

Growing together on branched reddish purple stalks, blue elderberries are small, sweet, and dusty blue-gray and have tiny buttons on one end.

How to gather

Typically, berries in a cluster ripen at roughly the same time, so entire clusters can be picked for later processing. Alternatively, clusters still

attached to a plant can be stroked or vigorously shaken to release the sweetest, ripest berries. Likewise, elderberry flowers typically present at the same time and can be picked in clusters.

How to eat

Cooked blue elderberries, in pies, pastries, jellies, wines, syrups, and other recipes, are guaranteed to please. In this, blue elderberry fares well when mixed with apple or other fruits. Blue elderberries can be eaten raw, but for a few people these berries cause nausea when eaten uncooked. Typically, red elderberries are only palatable when cooked, ideally with sweetener and mixed with other berries to mask some of the pungency, as is traditional. Eat red elderberries raw and nausea is almost certain to follow. Harvesters who develop tolerably flavorful red elderberry concoctions should share their results with the rest of us. Native recipes often involve cooking elderberries, blue or red, into cakes or syrupy multi-berry concoctions. Both elderberries are seedy; the seeds can be eaten and are satisfyingly crunchy in some cases, but a bit imposing in others. Flowers can be eaten fresh on salads, stir fried, or even batter fried, lending a sweet, light flowery flavor to any meal. If you wash the flowers prior to cooking, they lose a surprisingly large amount of their flavor, so spend a few introspective moments to determine whether hygiene or flavor ranks higher on your personal priority list.

The tiny white flowers of red and blue elderberries grow in dense stalk-borne clusters and may be gathered before the berries arrive.

Future harvests

Elderberry readily propagates from seed. Gather one or two berry clusters and bury them in a suitable site for germination. Rooted cuttings work well, too, but hardly seem necessary. Elderberry is not only exceedingly useful for humans, but is very popular with birds and other wildlife as well; they would thank you, if they could, for enhancing elderberry where it is otherwise uncommon.

Warnings

Some sources report that the alkaloids in the seeds and raw berries make them mildly toxic. For some people, this can cause mild digestive discomfort. Those with special medical concerns may want to avoid elderberries, especially when raw.

evergreen huckleberry

Vaccinium ovatum

shot berry

EDIBLE berries

These sweet and juicy little berries are soft on the inside and very firm on the outside.

These showy evergreen shrubs produce small, sweet, and succulent berries, with colors ranging from dusty blue to shiny dark purple and black. They are juicy on the inside, and very firm on the outside. When bitten, these berries often respond with a satisfying pop. Native Americans and early settlers called the small round fruits shot berry or shot olallie, because of their resemblance to buckshot. Thankfully, the berries taste much better than that name might imply. Much to the delight of florists and landscapers alike, the shrubs keep their shiny and subtly serrated leaves throughout the year, arranged alternately along each stem.

Persistence is what sets evergreen huckleberries apart from the rest. Arriving in late summer, they stay on the bush long after other Northwestern berries have rotted away, providing food for humans and many of our animal kin for many months. Berries cure and even sweeten as time goes by, so that in most Northwestern settings they are the last best thing to eat in the wild until mid-winter. Even in December, a handful of evergreen huckleberries can be a satisfying forest treat.

Although evergreen huckleberries are often very dark, some appear as dusty blue clusters.

Tight clusters of evergreen huckleberries, purple to black, crowd stems lined with shiny and neatly serrated evergreen leaves.

How to identify

Erect, bushy evergreen shrub, 1 to 9 feet tall, with thick leathery leaves, dark shiny green on top and paler below. Leaves are lance-shaped, about 1 inch long, and finely toothed. Little pale pink urn-shaped flowers cluster densely and develop into deep purplish black berries.

Where and when to gather

Evergreen huckleberry is found in clearings and on the margins of evergreen forests from the western slopes of the Cascade Range crest to the sea. Doing best in wet but well-drained soils, the hardy shrub also thrives on stabilized sand or gravel, such as on dune and beach margins where a thin layer of soil has become established. Especially abundant close to rivers, streams, and beaches, the bush can dominate a sunny shoreline. Berry pickers should gather at these places as early as late July, but by early

autumn evergreen huckleberries abound. They can be found on bushes into December or even January.

How to gather

Evergreen huckleberries can be picked one by one to good effect. For those too impatient to pick tiny berries in this way, there are options. Because they grow in dense clusters, these firm berries can be removed by fingers raking through the foliage or with berry rakes, which do little if any damage to the durable leaves that remain attached to the stem.

Pink, urn-shaped flowers grow densely along evergreen huckleberry stalks in spring and early summer.

How to eat

These small berries can be eaten one by one, but this takes a rare type of devotion, with the berries serving like wild harvesters' rosary beads. Evergreen huckleberries are best eaten by the handful. Their sweet flavor, snappy texture, deep color, and small size make them very popular for

muffins, pancakes, and other baked goods. Jams and jellies work well, with robust huckleberry flavor.

Future harvests

A person who aids in the proliferation of evergreen huckleberry is doing a truly good deed, for these berries not only sustain harvesters for months every year, but provide food for birds and mammals well into the stressful and lean winter months. Scattering berries in sunny and unoccupied settings, such as along roadsides, near beaches, or in well-drained forest clearings, is advised. Transplanting works too, as long as most of the root network can be kept intact and the plant is moved between sites of similar shading and moisture.

fireweed

Chamerion angustifolium (formerly *Epilobium angustifolium*)

EDIBLE shoots, stems, leaves, flowers, roots

Edible inner stems can be sweet and juicy, and vitamin-rich young leaves serve as a tea or a slightly tangy potherb.

Fireweed reminds us that exceptionally common plants can be exceptionally beautiful. Appearing on recently burned sites or simply setting the landscape ablaze in reddish pink to purple hues, this plant earns its fiery name as well as a place in the foraging repertoire. Edible inner stems can be sweet and juicy, and the vitamin-rich young leaves serve as a tea or as a slightly tangy potherb to flavor cooked greens, soups, and the like. Looking like a small version of fireweed, closely related willow herbs can also be found in the Northwest and can be used similarly.

Standing tall, with stalks topped by brilliantly colored flowers, fireweed transforms clearcuts, roadsides, and marsh edges into windblown fields of purple and pink each summer.

How to identify

Perennial with erect, unbranched, and leafy stems from 3 to 8 feet tall. Leaves are long and narrowly lance-shaped, similar to willow leaves. Rose to purple flowers are carried in spiked clusters atop the stately flower stalk. Seed pods split open and release hundreds of minute seeds with abundant fluffy, silky hairs.

Where and when to gather

Fireweed and its close kin are happiest in sunny moist clearings, especially in recently burned or logged forests or along roadsides and streambanks. The new growth of spring and early summer is best for most uses, whether you are gathering leaves, flowers, stems, or shoots; if leaves are to be used, opt for those that are newly sprouted and light green. Once mature, the plant's various parts turn hard and bitter.

How to gather

Fireweed may be picked wherever you find it. Hands are all that is needed to harvest new growth, but a pocket knife may be of use for larger stalks.

How to eat

To eat the interior stem, split the stalk and strip the interior of the stem with fingernails or a pocket knife. Young leaves and shoots can be eaten as fresh or cooked greens. Use a few leaves to add flavor and complexity to soups and green mixes. Flowers are edible and make a striking garnish. Larger roots, dug when the plant is dormant, can also be cooked and eaten and are sometimes used in medicinal preparations.

Future harvests

As a plant that specializes in reoccupying disturbed ground, fireweed often proliferates well on its own, with fluffy seeds whipping in all directions from limber stalks late in the growing season. Gather seeds from long, thin seed pods that grow in the flowers' wake and redistribute them in suitable clearings.

goosefoot

Atriplex patula

orache, spear saltbush

EDIBLE leaves, seeds

Leaves are salty and tangy.

Growing along beaches and on disturbed ground, goosefoot is a distinctive little plant, with roughly triangular and three-lobed leaves, vaguely reminiscent of little goose feet, on knee-high stalks. The leaves add a slightly salty and tangy dimension to fresh or cooked greens, and the seeds are a common thickener for grain mixtures, soups, and other foods. The plant is found throughout the Northern Hemisphere, native to some places and a fully naturalized weed in others. In the Northwest, we have native and non-native subspecies alike. Though commonly overlooked as part of the weedy tangle, goosefoot has been a popular supplementary wild food for generations of Northwesterners and deserves a second look.

Dusty green, with triangular and often three-lobed leaves, goosefoot grows on Northwestern shorelines and other clearings.

In some settings, especially in saltier places, goosefoot is semi-succulent, extending fleshy three-lobed leaves above the shoreline.

How to identify

Prostrate or upright annual with spreading stems 2 to 3 feet long. Leaves, somewhat fleshy, range from triangular to lance-shaped or oblong, and the whole plant is dusted with a powdery, whitish meal. Very small green flowers cluster densely at the ends of branches or where leaves meet the stem.

Where and when to gather

Goosefoot is especially common on disturbed ground near beaches and other shorelines. Leaves are best harvested when young and fresh. They can be eaten later in the season, but older leaves have a bite that can irritate the throat. Seeds are best gathered in autumn.

How to gather

Leaves can be picked one by one, or entire new plants can be picked at the base. Seeds are best collected by running fingers along a seed-bearing stalk and stripping them en masse.

How to eat

With their salty, tangy qualities, goosefoot leaves are a good addition to salads. Use like spinach as a cooked green. Seeds are usually roasted or pan-heated then ground and used as a thickener in porridges, soups, and other viscous vittles.

Future harvests

This plant’s range has been expanding, as it gladly occupies the disturbed ground that humankind leaves in its wake. Also, without some detailed understanding of botany, it is difficult to know whether you are propagating a native or non-native variety. For these reasons and others, wild propagation should be employed cautiously, if at all.

goosegrass

Galium species

bedstraw, cleavers, sticky grass

EDIBLE leaves, stems, seeds

The seeds can be roasted and ground for use as a coffee substitute.

Goosegrass is a versatile but inconspicuous plant, often found wending over and under moist Northwestern thickets. The early-season leaves and stems can be cooked as green vegetables, and the late-season burr-like fruits can be roasted as a passable low-caffeine coffee substitute. This creeping annual plant is somewhat distinctive, with tiny hooks lining its stems and leaves, creating Velcro-like surfaces that aid the plant in its frenetic scramble for sunlight each spring and its animal-borne search for new seeding opportunities in autumn. The thin pointy leaves often exhibit their own little hooks. Children toss leaf-and-stem segments at each other, and they hold fast to hair and clothing. In Europe, sweet-smelling *Galium* is used in poultices as well as beverages, and the use in bedding has historical roots, contributing to the common name bedstraw. Hugely important as a medicinal plant, goosegrass can be used in teas and poultices for diverse ailments. A variety of *Galium* species are widely dispersed in the Pacific Northwest, so experiment with the potential of the plants at hand and proceed from there.

Winding through and clinging to nearby plants with Velcro-like hooks, goosegrass tendrils climb over grasslands and thickets throughout the warmer months.

How to identify

Perennial with weak, sprawling, four-sided stems and oblong leaves in five to eight whorls that radiate around the main stem. Little hooked bristles protrude from the angles of stems as well as along the margins and veins of leaves. Minute white or green flowers form rounded clusters that are carried on small stalks from the middle of the leaf whorls along the stem. These form into tiny, dry, two-lobed burrs covered with hooked bristles.

Where and when to gather

Moist clearings, stream and forest margins, and disturbed wet meadows are all fine places to find the myriad species of goosegrass. The leaves and stems are best when they exhibit the electric green of spring and before fruits have formed. Mid-summer to autumn is usually the time to gather the fruits, as they begin to break easily from the stalks.

How to gather

Pick entire green sections of the plant. In most species, these sections can be long and sticky, and thus easily bundled together for later use. The fruits can be picked individually, but when ripe are often so loose that they can be gathered by shaking or running one’s hand along the plant’s stalk.

How to eat

Most harvesters find the Velcro texture to be a real impediment to their enjoyment, but some still eat the plant fresh. Cooking generally resolves the issue. The seeds can be roasted and ground for use as a coffee substitute. Goosegrass has also been used to add flavor to herbal teas and alcoholic beverages.

Future harvests

Best dispersed through its burr-like fruits, goosegrass can be intentionally sown in appropriate habitats. Often clinging unnoticed to clothing, hair, pets, and children, it happily enlists our assistance in its inadvertent seeding as well.

Warnings

Some people can consume only small amounts of goosegrass due to the high concentrations of coumarin in its tissues. This chemical compound will usually trigger headaches in the coumarin-sensitive before it becomes a problem, but it can cause life-threatening complications in such individuals when consumed in quantity.

hazelnut

Corylus cornuta

wild hazel, wild filbert, beaked hazelnut, California hazelnut

EDIBLE nuts

This nut can be added to salads and baked goods, ground and used as flour, or mixed into confections and liqueurs.

Many harvesters may be familiar with the rich, buttery nut flavor of commercially grown hazelnuts, but fewer know that the wild hazelnut found in Northwestern fields and forests has a similar look and flavor, if a smaller size, than its commercialized cousins. The look of the hazelnut is distinctive: two round, brown nuts grow side by side, each concealed in a bristly tube-shaped green beak or husk. In winter and early spring, these trees lack leaves, but still stand out in the landscape as a tangle of bare sticks adorned with long dangling catkins. One of the very few wild nuts available to Northwestern harvesters, hazelnuts are highly prized by people, birds, and myriad nut-munching quadrupeds alike. Native peoples have traditionally held productive hazelnut groves in high esteem, some traveling long distances for even small harvests and igniting small fires to burn away competing vegetation and promote bud growth. Closely related hazelnut species have been cultivated worldwide and are among the earliest nuts detected in European archaeological sites from thousands of years ago.

Hazelnuts growing on the tree, with their characteristic beak-shaped husk that joins nuts together in pairs.

How to identify

Small, sometimes shrubby, deciduous tree with flexible stems and a rounded crown, between 3 and 15 feet tall. Large, felty, oval leaves have heart-shaped bases, pointed tips, and doubly serrated edges. Dangling brownish red catkins produce clusters of two or three nuts carried in light green, bristly husks.

Where and when to gather

Hazelnut ordinarily grows in dense thickets, in open forests and forest margins, especially in the west-side forests of the Pacific Northwest. Hazelnuts are best gathered in autumn, once the nuts have reached their full size but before birds and squirrels have eaten them or cached them away for winter food.

How to gather

Hazelnuts can be picked one by one. They can be harvested when just barely ripe, before any nuts are falling on their own, and will ripen further in storage. They can also be gathered from the ground. Some harvesters put hazelnuts in water after picking, and those that float are usually discarded.

The leaves of wild hazelnut are large and roughly oval, with little toothy serrations on their edges.

How to eat

The small hairs on the durable beak-shaped husks can irritate fingers after a long day of harvesting and processing nuts, so various techniques have been used to remove the husk, from charring it to dampening the harvested nuts and letting the husk rot slightly before peeling. Nuts can be cracked using a conventional nutcracker, no matter whether the nut is husk-bearing or not.

Hazelnuts can be air-dried, but many harvesters prefer the flavor imparted by roasting. Nuts can be eaten one by one, but they are also suitable for any culinary duty conventionally assigned to commercial

hazelnuts: placed in salads and baked goods, ground and used as flour, mixed into confections and liqueurs. The nut is rich in protein, healthy omega fatty acids, and vitamin E.

Future harvests

Volunteer seedlings commonly appear around the base of mature trees and can be transplanted to appropriate sites. A portion of the nut harvest can be set aside for replanting—indeed, some of the best modern patches of hazelnuts were planted in autumn by squirrels and jays in times long past. Burning appears to enhance the productivity of hazelnut patches and promote the development of new, springy long stems, which can be used for a variety of crafts.

high-bush cranberry

Viburnum edule

mooseberry, squashberry, pembina

EDIBLE berries

The berries make good preserves and juices.

The brilliant red berries of this medium-sized shrub have an acidic, somewhat cranberry-like flavor. Though a bit lanky, high-bush cranberry is an attractive plant, with leaves that turn burgundy red and yellow in autumn. Berries stay on the branches long after the leaves have fallen, looking like tiny stick-borne ornaments by winter. Their flavor improves with age, and high-bush cranberries are among the few fruits available to gather and eat through much of the winter. Native peoples have long used these berries in ceremonial feasts, preserving berries picked in summer until they are presented in all their red tanginess to brighten up dark winter nights.

On shorelines and in sunny patches, high-bush cranberries perch in small clusters on tall reddish stalks with serrated leaves.

How to identify

A straggling to erect deciduous shrub, up to 11 feet tall, with smooth, leafy, reddish green branches. Three-lobed serrated leaves are dark green with short hairs along the undersides. Small clusters of white flowers develop into red or orange berries.

Where and when to gather

High-bush cranberry grows in high-elevation forests on the southern end of the Pacific Northwest, but can be found near sea level from the Puget Sound area northward. This plant is especially common near shorelines and other wet margins. Berries can be harvested in summer for later ripening, but they get sweet after the first frost and can usually be gathered into winter.

How to gather

Pick berries individually, or grab the clusters of berries that protrude from the leaf joints.

By late in the season, high-bush cranberries grow softer and sweeter, their leaves mellowing to a rich reddish green before they turn completely red or yellow.

How to eat

High-bush cranberry usually is bitter and a bit funky to musky in flavor when picked, but time or processing usually corrects the problem. Some harvesters eat raw berries, whereas others refuse. The berries are traditionally left in water or oil for an extended period to sweeten and soften, with a summer harvest often being consumed in winter or early

spring. For many recipes, a few repeat washings and boiling usually do the trick. The berries can be eaten like cranberries and can be mixed with commercial cranberries for diversity. High-bush cranberry also makes good jam, jellies, and compotes and can be used for juices.

Future harvests

Fruits and seeds can be transplanted to suitable sites, but cuttings also root readily.

Himalayan blackberry

Rubus armeniacus

EDIBLE berries, shoots

Blackberries are popular when eaten fresh, but also make outstanding additions to pies, pastries, jams, syrups, and other condiments.

Entangling vast swaths of the Northwestern landscape with its thorny briars, dangling with sweet, dark purple berries in summertime thickets, this plant needs little introduction. The Himalayan blackberry's tale is one of astonishing success. Originally from the damp middle elevations of the Caucasus Mountains, this plant was carried by British colonists back to Europe and beyond, where blackberry made its escape and embarked on a slow-motion scheme to dominate the globe. Himalayan blackberry is especially fond of the Northwest's climate and thrives here like few other places. Birds and mammals gladly eat the berries and carry them in their digestive tracts to new places, so that most places naturally conducive to occupation by blackberries are now eyebrow-deep in them. Thus, Himalayan blackberry has become in the Northwest what kudzu has become in the Southeast. As Tom Robbins noted in one of his more horticultural moments, blackberries spread so rapidly "that dogs and small children were sometimes engulfed and never heard from again…. Blackberry vines pushed up through solid concrete, forced their way into polite society, entwined the legs of virgins, and tried to loop themselves over passing clouds." Yet the delicious deep purple berries more than make up for all of this riotous entanglement and are a staple of even the most novice harvesters who linger in and around the urban fringe.

Though introduced and invasive in the Northwest, Himalayan blackberry is one of the most common and tastiest food plants to be found.

How to identify

A formidable, mostly evergreen vine with compound leaves and stout thorns interspersed along the stalks and on the underside of the oval, toothed leaves. Five-petaled white or pink-tinted flowers are replaced by generous clusters of juicy, lustrous, plump blackberries.

Where and when to gather

Preferring sunny and freshly disturbed spaces and unable to proliferate well in the forest shade, this introduced berry is especially fond of those places where human activity has created holes in the native vegetation. Although Himalayan blackberry can be found in any number of unnatural clearings, berries are best gathered in sunny but wet areas, ideally some distance away from automobile fumes and other sources of airborne particulate nastiness. Young shoots can be gathered as they emerge in spring and early summer. Berries typically begin to ripen in mid-summer and continue through the season.

Evergreen blackberry (*Rubus laciniatus*) resembles Himalayan blackberry in many respects, but has deeply incised leaves and a generally firmer, fruitier-tasting berry.

How to gather

Berries can be picked as soon as they are dark, soft, and ripe. Popular one by one, they can also be gathered in quantities. Bring a bucket. As berries ripen, tiny bugs tend to gather on them, so consider a good rinse if you are on a bug-restricted diet. The shoots of Himalayan blackberry are also tasty—with fruity flavor but varying sweetness—when peeled and eaten fresh.

Each blackberry is composed of many small dark drupelets, each bursting with sweet juice.

How to eat

Rich in sugars, blackberries are popular when eaten fresh by the handful, but make outstanding additions to pies, pastries, jams, syrups, and other condiments. They are also fine additions to beverages such as blackberry lemonade and have as-yet-unrealized potential in salads, sauces, and marinades.

Future harvests

As long as birds happily redistribute berry seeds and humans eagerly disturb native forests and soils, we probably need not fret about the fate of the Himalayan blackberry. Propagate only with due caution for its entangling vines, and have pruners and shovels at the ready for its next advance.

Berry shoots

Each spring, *Rubus* bushes (salmonberry, thimbleberry, blackberry, raspberry, blackcaps, and their kin) send out new canes, the principal means by which they grow upward and outward from year to year. Mustering much of their available sugars and nutrients, the plants send forth fledgling canes in the form of pliable bright green shoots, stretching toward the sunlight with soft budding leaves and thorns. When stripped of their leaves and exterior skin, the shoots are tender, often sweet and fruity, and nutrient-rich. The Native peoples of the Northwest celebrated the arrival of these shoots, the first significant plant food after the lean winter months and a portent of the bounty yet to come. Entire seasons were named for them. For instance, "salmonberry shoot time" was the phrase for April in some coastal languages.

Thimbleberry is a personal favorite, with a sweet green shoot that has a flavor vaguely reminiscent of the berry itself. Much the same can be said of certain wild raspberry shoots. Salmonberry and blackberry shoots often have a watery freshness, more subtle in flavor but still smacking with berry taste. Some shoots can have a bitter or vaguely astringent quality that makes them less palatable, and this varies based on the plant and location. Inexperienced harvesters have given up on berry shoots after sampling just one of these bitter specimens, but this is shortsighted. Experiment broadly, and you may discern the appealing flavors available in your area. Let soil moisture, sunlight exposure, species, and the color and springiness of the shoot be your clues.

Bursting from woody canes in the early spring, some of the best edible shoots can be found on native berry bushes, such as this salmonberry and its close relatives including thimbleberry and wild raspberry.

When berry shoots are new, their spines are soft and the outer skin, ranging from red to green, can be peeled off the juicy inner stalk with ease.

Berry shoots can be gathered wherever and whenever they appear in all their electric green springiness. At low elevations shoots sometimes appear by early spring and continue to appear into the early summer, with later timing at higher elevations. Damp locations often have the most robust shoots.

Look for the fresh shoots that are clearly from the current season's growth. The hard, woody shoots of yesteryear are comically inedible (unless you happen to be a goat). Test a potential shoot; if it bends readily and the leaves and needles are also soft and flexible, the shoot is probably worth trying. The shoot can be plucked at any point, down to its point of exit from the older stem segment or roots below. Ordinarily, a properly edible cane is so pliable that it can be broken off with fingers alone, but scissors or clippers may be desirable to avoid the new thorns.

Even the toughest blackberry canes in wintertime thickets contain life that lies dormant inside, emerging each spring as nutritious shoots that are tender and sweet.

Shoots are good raw, but they can also be steamed and eaten like asparagus, and both are traditional Northwestern practice. Roasting, stir frying, and other uses are still mostly in the giddy experimental phase, but the results to date are encouraging.

For the well-being of the plants, it is important to harvest selectively and not to strip every new shoot of the season from any plant. Considering the nutrient load being delivered to the new shoots, the plant has invested dearly in these branches, and some thankfulness and restraint seem in order. New berry bushes can be propagated by the dispersal of berries and the seeds they contain. Intensive shoot harvests can be a deliciously chemical-free way to keep non-native Himalayan blackberry thickets in check.

horsetail

Equisetum arvense (common horsetail)

Equisetum telmateia (giant horsetail)

EDIBLE shoots

The smaller reproductive shoots can be steamed and eaten like asparagus or mixed into soups and other foods for both flavor and thickening.

No other plant in the Northwest looks quite like horsetail, with its segmented, rough-ribbed, hollow central stalk and its radial spokes of thread-like branches. These main stalks are hard in part due to their ability to draw silicates from the soil below, and they have traditionally served as a fine-grained sandpaper for Northwestern woodworkers. In contrast, the smaller short-lived reproductive shoots are succulent and edible. Eaten fresh or steamed, these reproductive horsetail stalks were important as food for Northwest Native peoples, as they were for Europeans at one time, despite the plant's mild toxicity and the brevity of the reproductive stalk season.

The upright hollow green stalks of horsetail, encircled by shaggy tendrils, are a common sight along streams and roadsides of the Northwest.

The light-colored, reproductive shoots of horsetail appear early in the season, when they are tender and succulent.

Horsetail is best gathered in spring and early summer, when shoots first peek from the ground and the plant has not yet taken on its full shaggy appearance.

How to identify

Stout, hollow stems are composed of many segments. Reproductive stems emerge before the shaggy infertile stems and are unbranched, fleshy, and black near the base, with a brownish cone at the tip that has rows of horizontal dots or ridges. Dense whorls of branches form at nodes of infertile stems, with sheaths at the joints. Stems are hollow, up to 3 feet tall in common horsetail and sometimes up to 10 feet tall in giant horsetail. Giant horsetail is more robust and larger than common horsetail, and the sheathing at each segment is larger, looser, and more noticeably ribbed.

Where and when to gather

Horsetail can live in a wide variety of wet places, such as wet forest floors, swamp margins, seeps, streambanks, and roadside ditches. The edible reproductive shoots can be eaten as they appear in spring and early summer.

How to gather

Pick the entire light-colored reproductive shoot, and peel off the hard outer sheath of the stalk. Most harvesters dispose of the conical stalk tip, too.

How to eat

The reproductive shoots can be steamed and eaten like asparagus or mixed into soups and other foods for both flavor and thickening. Repeat rinsing or changing the cooking water is suggested to improve flavor and reduce the risk of toxicity. Some people eat horsetail fresh, but there is some added risk of toxicity when shoots are eaten this way. Horsetail is an ingredient in some herbal teas.

Future harvests

Horsetail can be nearly invasive in disturbed wet areas. Most successful horsetail propagation involves cutting underground root segments from a larger patch for transplanting.

Warnings

Horsetail contains a complex cocktail of alkaloids. The plant may be mildly toxic to humans in large quantities, and it is certainly toxic to livestock. Consume this plant in cautious moderation, if at all. Some people insist that it is an essential wild edible, eating it without incident, whereas others insist that it should be avoided. Do not attempt to eat the green infertile stalks.

Indian plum

Oemleria cerasiformis

osoberry, bird cherry

EDIBLE fruits

These plums have a flavor that has been compared to cherries or watermelon.

Indian plum is a distinctive plant and the only member of its genus to be found in the world. Other plums, such as the Klamath plum (*Prunus subcordata*), are found in drier forests and scrublands of the Pacific Northwest, but are more closely related to wild cherries than to this species. Instead, Indian plum is a tall shrub with oblong light green leaves, each smelling a little like cucumber, and a shock of white spring flowers that dangle from stem tips even before the leaves fully appear. As the season moves on, these flowers become clusters of the characteristic plums, which first become reddish pink and then deep blue as they ripen. When underripe, Indian plums are a little dry and more than a little bitter, but they become sweet when ripe, with a flavor that has been compared to cherries or watermelon. Indian plum is a popular snack for both human harvesters and their avian neighbors.

How to identify

Deciduous shrub or small tree with narrow, oval, pale green leaves that are smooth and tender, with edges somewhat rolled under. Bell-shaped, greenish white flowers hang in clusters before leaves emerge and develop into small plum-like fruits that are pink to deep blue and dusted with white, waxy powder.

When and where to gather

Indian plum grows passably well in the understory of moist but open forests, but it thrives on the forest's shrubby margins and on sunny thicket and roadside margins. Indian plum is one of the earlier fruits in the region; they can be gathered through the late spring and summer as they turn deep blue, but you must arrive early to beat the birds.

How to gather

Plums can be gathered one by one as they become blue. Often entire clusters become ripe at the same time, allowing harvesters to pick many at once.

No other plant looks like the Indian plum, with its drooping blue fruit, red fruit stems, and pale oval leaves.

How to eat

When fully ripe, the plums are very good fresh, but sometimes with a bitter edge. When cooked, the bitterness dissipates and the plums work well in jams, sauces, baked goods, and any other recipe where a plum might fit. The large pits need to be removed before cooking.

Future harvests

Place seeds removed during food processing back in the earth for future harvests. Volunteer seedlings are often found near the base of mature Indian plum bushes, and layering (placing low-lying branches under soil until they root) also works well with this plant.

juniper

Juniperus communis (common juniper)

Juniperus occidentalis (western juniper)

EDIBLE berries

The berries add a potent conifer flavor to gin and other beverages, as well as soups and other foods.

With its pungent-smelling pointy foliage and dusty blue fragrant berries, juniper is surprisingly widespread in the Northwest. In the interior, western juniper is the dominant tree over vast swaths of the landscape, whereas in the maritime Northwest the common juniper is found as groundcover in a variety of clearings and rocky sites. Traditional uses of the plant are similarly widespread, with the greenery being used for myriad medicinal, ceremonial, and olfactory functions. The berries can be eaten, with all their potent conifer vibe, but are probably best known as the flavoring agent in gin and other beverages, as well as soups and other foods.

How to identify

Common juniper is a coniferous evergreen trailing shrub, often forming mats or clumps, with thin, brown, fibrous bark. Greenish silver needle leaves are stiff and arranged in whorls of three. The berry-like seed cones emerge pale green and darken to bluish black or gray when mature, dusted with white bloom. Western juniper is an evergreen tree up to 30 feet tall, with a broad crown of stout, spreading branches, or a shrub. Scale-like gray-green leaves cluster mostly in threes, and bark is shredding and reddish brown. White bloom dusts small berry-like blue-black to gray cones.

Where and when to gather

Western juniper is widespread east of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, whereas common juniper can be found in rocky, exposed areas west of these mountains. Berries can be gathered at various times of the year, but some harvesters choose to wait until the tiny flowers are done blooming so that harvest will not harm future years' crops.

How to gather

Berries take two or three years to mature, so you will want to focus on those that are deep blue and larger and slightly softer than the rest. Shake branches of juniper vigorously and ripe berries should come off without complaint; a tarp placed underneath the bush beforehand makes collection much easier.

How to eat

The berries are widely used to flavor beverages, especially gin and liqueurs. Some harvesters use juniper berries to season stews, soups, potatoes, roasted meats or vegetables, casseroles, stuffing, and many other foods. They can be used fresh or dried, whole or crushed—each imparting a slightly different strength and quality of juniper flavor. The berries are also used in various herbal medicines, soaps, and cosmetics.

Spiky green needles of common juniper surround the distinctive blue-gray berries, which are round but slightly irregular in shape.

Future harvests

Especially east of the Cascade Range, juniper is doing well and even expanding its range due to fire suppression and other changes in land management. Planting of berries and seeds might make sense in some settings, but may be unnecessary. Very old juniper groves are spectacular to behold and may deserve more respect than they get. West of the Cascades, common juniper has suffered from the heavy boot of progress, and propagation would be wise in suitable sites.

Warnings

In spite of its benefits, juniper must be used with great caution. Especially in large quantities, the berries of many junipers are toxic or mildly so. Juniper can sometimes stimulate uterine contractions, so any food or

beverage containing juniper should be carefully avoided by pregnant women. People with other medical conditions, such as diabetes, blood pressure anomalies, stomach troubles, and the like may want to consult a doctor before getting too excited about the harvesting potential of juniper.

kinnikinnick

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi

bearberry

EDIBLE berries, leaves

The pithy berries are often mixed with other berries to add bulk, color, and complex flavors to the mix.

In sandy and rocky corners of the Northwest, one encounters a tough, creeping groundcover with lustrous and leathery deep green leaves and round, brilliantly red berries. Kinnikinnick is its common name, an Algonquin term that entered into local usage along the lower Columbia River during the fur trade, referencing the time-honored tradition of smoking its leaves (which have a mildly narcotic effect). The leaves can also be used fresh or dried in teas, providing an unremarkable flavor but a plethora of reported health benefits, especially centered on kidney and bladder complaints. Although the smoking and medicinal possibilities of the plant are perhaps its greatest appeal to harvesters, the berries are worthy of some attention. The berries are pithy and kind of flavorless, to be honest, but can be eaten fresh or cooked; they are often mixed with other berries to conceal these traits while adding bulk, color, and complex flavors to the mix. The berries of many of kinnikinnick's manzanita relatives in southern Oregon and California are traditionally crushed and brewed into a cider by Native Americans, a recipe that might warrant consideration for kinnikinnick as well. Its ornamental properties have long been appreciated by Native and non-Native harvesters alike.

The color of kinnikinnick’s red berries intensifies through the summer months, while its leaves darken and stems creep across the ground.

How to identify

A small trailing shrub that forms freely rooting mats. Leathery, evergreen leaves are dark green, shiny, and petite, with smooth edges. Tiny pink, lantern-shaped flowers, somewhat waxy, change to small scarlet berries.

Where and when to gather

This plant is especially abundant along coastlines, in sandy and rocky shoreline areas, and on rocky exposed areas in the mountains above. Kinnikinnick leaves can be gathered almost year-round. Berries appear in spring and are edible, more or less, by mid-summer.

How to gather

Leaves and berries can be picked individually from the plant. Because of the small size and the drying customarily required for the use of leaves,

harvesters often cut small sections out of the creeping stems and take them home for later drying and processing. To dry leaves for storage and later use, hang stem segments in a dry, well-ventilated area or apply very low heat to leaves until moisture has dissipated.

How to eat

Some tea-makers steep kinnikinnick leaves like any loose tea, but the long-term soaking of leaves is sometimes required to obtain desired strengths; boiling can ruin the flavors. Potential berry-eaters may want to experiment to determine their thresholds of tolerance; some people can tolerate the taste of raw berries and some cannot. Cooking, mixing with other berries, or adding butter and sweeteners often helps. Fermentation for use in food and beverages may have unexplored potential. The seeds are large and hard and are a perennial problem that may require a food mill or its equivalent.

Future harvests

Kinnikinnick propagation is a worthwhile pursuit, even if you do not plan to harvest leaves and berries. The berries are popular with birds and other wildlife, the plant is profoundly ornamental, and its groundcover creep can eventually stabilize disturbed or barren grounds. Berries and the seeds they contain are best used for propagation. Place them in barren places and work them into the earth deep enough that they will not be foraged by wildlife.

knotweed

Polygonum cuspidatum (giant knotweed)

Polygonum sachalinense (Japanese knotweed, sakhalene)

EDIBLE shoots

Wonderfully edible, with shoots that have varying citrus flavors and can be used as a rhubarb substitute in a wide range of preserves and baked goods.

Knotweed is popping up all over the Northwest, with its huge heart- to lance-shaped leaves on bamboo-like stalks. Many harvesters will recognize knotweed as one of our most aggressive and visible invasive plants, expanding each year onto fresh streambanks and patches of disturbed ground. What is less known is that knotweed is wonderfully edible, with lemony rhubarb-like shoots that appear in late spring. Perhaps if we all eat this plant and experiment with its culinary potential, we can achieve what has so far eluded its many herbicide-wielding detractors.

Like the Himalayan blackberries that preceded it, knotweed is an Asian expatriate with a particular fondness for the climate of the Pacific Northwest. Our invasive knotweeds hail from northern Japan and various parts of Siberia, where brutally cold winter temperatures will, as Chekhov noted, cause people and plants alike to “freeze … wither away, and die gently,” keeping the diffusion of knotweed and a good many other living things in check. Admiring their resemblance to bamboo, gardeners carried these plants to the lush and relatively temperate Northwest. Once here, knotweed plants lost their climatological inhibitions and enthusiastically began rooting on any bare patch of ground where gardeners might be so careless as to toss a few fragmentary roots or stems. Knotweed becomes locally dominant, crowding out native plants, damaging roads and house foundations, and causing myriad other forms of botanical anarchy. Landscapers and extension agents now battle mightily to hold back the growing tide. Please consider what role you might have in eating this plant,

so that balance might be restored to Northwestern ecosystems and your home might be filled with pies, jellies, and other foods made from this delicious nuisance.

How to identify

A large, vigorous, leafy perennial with spreading roots. Hollow stems are numerous and erect, reddish brown, and freely branching up to 8 feet tall. Heart-shaped leaves are 4 to 6 inches long. The whitish flowers are borne in open, drooping clusters and give way to small, smooth black or dark brown fruits.

Large knotweed leaves with pointed tips sit on reddish green, bamboo-like stems that are adorned seasonally by clusters of small white flowers.

Where and when to gather

Knotweed’s distribution is more widespread with each passing year, but the plants can generally be found along streambanks and in moist patches of disturbed ground, such as along roadsides, ditches, vacant lots, and gardens.

Shoots can be gathered in late spring, when they emerge from the base of dead stalks remaining from prior years.

How to gather

The springy fresh shoots can be cut or simply snapped free from the base of the stalk. Lengths vary depending upon the exact species and the site, but springiness is key. Once the stalks begin to harden in anticipation of their leaves, the shoots quickly become less tender and flavorful.

How to eat

The young, fresh shoots have varying citrus flavors and are of growing popularity as a rhubarb substitute in pies, chutneys, jellies, dessert toppings, and other foods. They are generally processed like rhubarb stalks, being rinsed, chopped, and cooked in small pieces. Experiment freely and share your successes with the rest of us. Online knotweed recipes are becoming more common with each passing year.

Future harvests

Because knotweed is a comically invasive plant that threatens to take over vast swaths of the Northwestern landscape, please don’t help it proliferate. When harvesting, do not leave even the most benign-looking root or stem fragments on the ground. If eaten in sufficient quantities, knotweed may become a minor, persistent component of the Northwest’s plant palette, which is perhaps the best possible compromise.

lady fern

Athyrium filix-femina

EDIBLE fiddleheads, roots

Lady fern has clear licorice notes, and fiddleheads are good raw or cooked.

Tall, delicately lacy, and bright green, the deciduous leaves of the lady fern stand out among Northwestern plants. Growing in moist places, this fern provides some of the same food benefits that characterize ferns, with edible fiddleheads and passably edible roots.

How to identify

Graceful fern with bright green, diamond-shaped clustered fronds, erect and spreading, 2 to 3 feet tall. Stems are often red, and leaflets are finely toothed, creating an appearance of feathery daintiness.

Taller than bracken fern and yellowish in cast, lady ferns look lanky and lacy beside other Northwestern ferns.

Where and when to gather

This fern thrives in damp and shady places, such as the margins of skunk cabbage bogs. Spring is the time for fiddlehead gathering, whereas roots are best gathered in early spring or in autumn, when the plant directs sugars and nutrients to roots instead of foliage.

Though newly sprouted, lady fern fiddleheads are already leafy and lacy in appearance, with small delicate fern foliage clinging to a coiled stem.

How to gather

The fiddlehead stalks appear as new fronds emerge from the root. These curled tops and the pliable stems to which they are attached can be plucked by hand or with a knife. Take the flexible portions and leave the stiff and hardened lower stalk behind; a little experimentation will soon show you the correlation between pliability and palatability. Roots can be dug from the ground by shovel and taken in whole or in part. Be sparing, as root use

commonly kills the entire plant, and lady fern roots are a poor replacement for other edible roots, such as those of the spiny wood fern.

How to eat

Fiddleheads and the soft stems attached to them are good raw or cooked, with steaming being especially popular. Successful pickling has also been reported. Roots can be roasted, the outer layers peeled, and the soft inner layers eaten. Like most ferns, the lady fern has clear licorice notes, and bitterness varies between plants and plant parts.

Future harvests

Lateral rhizome sections can be taken from the root network of lady fern and planted in new locations. Also, foliage will sometimes have fertile spores—look for tiny brown or black spots on its underside. Such foliage can be picked and transported to other suitable locations as is. Alternatively, the foliage can be dried so that the spores come loose and can be collected for later scattering on appropriate ground. Turning the soil will work these spores into the duff layer and ensure good propagation.

lamb’s quarters

Chenopodium album

white goosefoot, pigweed

EDIBLE leaves, flower buds, flower shoots, seeds

The fresh leaves can be used like spinach, and the little black seeds are similar to quinoa.

This lanky introduced weed with amorphously goosefoot-shaped leaves and stalks of silvery green flowers is among the tastiest invasive weeds one could ask for. The young leaves are very popular with urban fringe foragers, either raw or cooked, as are the undeveloped flower stalks and buds. The plant is also popular around the world, being cultivated for food in Asia and Africa. In Europe and the Americas, however, it is generally ignored or even doused with herbicides. Where it is cultivated, lamb’s quarters serves as a nutritious and tasty green that can be used like spinach. A relative of quinoa, lamb’s quarters also develops literally tens of thousands of little black seeds on each plant, which are harvested in Asia and Africa as a grain. These grains have been found at ancient European archaeological sites and even in the recovered innards of a few ancient Europeans. Northwesterners might benefit by learning to accept this globally important Eurasian plant as a food source, with all its virtues and challenges, instead of attempting to beat back its invasion.

How to identify

Annual bushy plant with leafy stems and firm succulent leaves that are broadly triangular, oblong, or diamond-shaped and widely toothed. The upper surface is usually green or bluish green, and the underside is covered with fine white mealy particles. Individual flowering spikes can be up to 8 inches, covered with dense clusters of inconspicuous silvery green flowers.

Where and when to gather

Lamb’s quarters typically grows near people and their settlements on disturbed but still fertile ground. Gathering of leaves, flower stalks, and flower buds can occur from spring to autumn, but these portions are sweetest when they are young and tender in spring and early summer—before the plant bolts from knee- to head-height and tends to topple over from the weight. Grain harvests are done as the seeds turn dark black in late summer and autumn.

How to gather

Pick young individual leaves, flower stalks, flower buds, or entire plants for greens. Seeds can be gathered by stripping or beating the stalk with a bucket or tarp at the ready to catch the thousands of seeds that will inevitably fall.

Lamb’s quarters is a diminutive but important edible plant of the Pacific Northwest. Stalks are lined with small-lobed dusty green leaves that are triangular to oblong to diamond-shaped.

How to eat

The fresh leaves, flower stalks, and flower buds are sweet and very popular fresh or cooked. The leaves are eaten in all of the settings where one might use spinach. Indian cuisine has many recipes for these greens, in curries and a range of other vegetable dishes. As these plants are very tender when young, cooking times should be brief. Seeds can be roasted and used like

quinoa in cereals, breads, and beyond. Here, too, Asian and African cuisines give inspiration.

Future harvests

This plant is invasive and is still widely considered a weed. Wild propagation is not encouraged, but there are many reasons to think that the agricultural cultivation of lamb’s quarters will become increasingly popular in time.

licorice fern

Polypodium glycyrrhiza

EDIBLE roots

The root can be used fresh or dried in teas, where it provides a licorice flavor.

Traveling through the mossy forests of the Pacific Northwest, harvesters will often encounter this small, bright green fern suspended on the sides of trees by its knobby roots. As the name suggests, this root has a sweet licorice flavor that is especially popular in teas and medicines.

Beneath the moss, the gnarled roots of licorice fern can be seen clinging to the tree, revealing the “many-footed” meaning of this fern’s genus, *Polypodium*.

How to identify

Evergreen fronds composed of smooth, simple leaflets extend from green, knobby cord-shaped roots with reddish brown sheaths. Leaf stalks, 10 to 12 inches long, extend from the root individually, not in clusters.

Where and when to gather

Licorice fern can be found in moist forests on the sides of trees or occasionally rocks, with roots concealed in moss or rotting wood. Roots can be gathered year-round. New summer growth is good, but sweetness increases in autumn as the foliage dies back.

How to gather

Gently pull moss and other debris apart to reveal roots of the fern. Cut or break off segments of the roots and strip off any foliage prior to use or storage. Thicker woody roots are not tasty, but the fresher green root segments typically are.

How to eat

The root can be used fresh or dried in teas, where it provides a licorice flavor, usually sweet. The juice is traditionally used for sore throats. Some harvesters eat the roots steamed or roasted, though reviews are mixed due to their toughness. Slow cooking at low heat can soften them somewhat, making licorice fern roots a suitable addition to cooked vegetables, soups, and other foods in need of a gingery bite.

Clusters of short, bright green fern fronds protrude from tree-side moss, a sure sign of licorice fern.

Future harvests

Licorice fern grows slowly, so leave most of the plant and root system intact, taking only new root segments from each plant. New roots are generally fleshy and green below their outer sheath and protrude from the terminal end of each root, whereas older roots are more woody, brown, and in the interior of the root network. Replanting rootlets with a leaf or two attached can help establish licorice fern in appropriately mossy habitats.

monkeyflower

Mimulus guttatus

yellow monkeyflower

EDIBLE flowers, leaves

Both the leaves and flowers have a bitter, somewhat salty flavor that is popular as a seasoning or as a complement to sweeter greens.

In moist forests and along springs and seeps, one often sees this distinctive trumpet-shaped yellow flower with its hairy-looking insides and lobed petals with little crimson spots. The flowers have a bright and cheery appearance, but both they and the leaves have a bitter, somewhat salty flavor that is popular as a seasoning or as a complement to sweeter and more conventional greens. The entire plant has culinary potential that is not fully realized.

How to identify

Small annual or perennial, erect to trailing, 2 to 24 inches tall, with leafy, light green, round, irregularly lobed leaves carried in pairs opposite each other along the angled stem. Delicate canary yellow flowers are composed of a lower lip sporting three lobes and a larger upper lip with two. Together they form a trumpet shape with little hairs in the interior and marked in the throat with crimson dots.

Where and when to gather

Monkeyflower is common in wet places: on the damp forest floor, along seeps and springs, and even in ditches and streamside gravel bars. The plant appears in spring and can be harvested through summer, though early gathering is recommended as flavors become increasingly bitter over the season, especially once the plant has begun to flower profusely.

How to gather

Leaves or flowers can be picked from the plant, or whole plants can be picked from larger patches.

How to eat

In light of their bitter and salty flavors, leaves are best mixed with other foods, either fresh in salads or in cooked green mixes and soups. The leaves and flowers make fine edible garnishes.

Future harvests

Flowers develop into seed capsules in late summer and can be redistributed to suitable sites. Whole plants can be transplanted from larger patches by cutting out sections of the creeping underground rhizomes.

Monkeyflower sports two bright yellow lobes above and three below, all arranged symmetrically around a deep and hairy tube.

mountain ash

Sorbus scopulina (western mountain ash, rowan)

Sorbus sitchensis (Sitka mountain ash)

EDIBLE berries

Berries are tart, with a distinctive flavor, and when sweetened they make popular jams, jellies, wines, and juices.

Each spring, the showy small mountain ash trees explode with bright green leaves and clusters of white flowers. Over the summer, the flowers transform into bunches of flame-orange berries, with each bunch consisting of perhaps twenty to forty berries. By late summer, the berries are ready to consume. They are tart, with a distinctive flavor that defies easy comparison; when sweetened they make popular jams, jellies, wines, and juices. Some European wines, teas, and even breads are also flavored with berries of *Sorbus* species. Not deterred by tartness, birds relish the berries, and ash trees can become swirling centers of bird diversity in late summer. With a vitamin C content comparable to citrus fruits, the ash is probably worth all this avian affection. Native American and old European oral traditions celebrate the medicinal values of the ash tree, suggesting a long and fruitful association between our species.

How to identify

Deciduous shrub or small tree, 5 to 20 feet tall, with smooth reddish brown to gray bark. Compound, oblong to lance-shaped leaves are sharply serrated and darker green on top than beneath. Small white flowers form fluffy clusters and are replaced by bright red to orange berries that look like tiny apples.

Where and when to gather

Western mountain ash thrives on the margins of low- to middle-elevation forests, where the trees can reach for the sun. Sitka mountain ash is shrubbier, growing on rocky slopes in northern and mountainous areas. Closely related European cultivars are becoming established on the fringes of settlements and along roadways. The berries from each of these can be used similarly. The berries often taste sweeter in the late season—even after a first frost—but birds commonly strip the trees bare before then.

Edible berries of brilliant reddish orange emerge in clusters on mountain ashes in summer, and the small thin leaves are arranged on opposite sides of reddish stems.

How to gather

Pick individual berries or, for the sake of efficiency, entire berry clusters once ripened.

How to eat

Ash berries are most popular mixed with other fruits in jams and jellies. Some harvesters press and consume the juice, though it can be very bitter.

Various techniques have been reported to reduce bitterness, such as extended soaking of the berries in water or vinegar. This juice can be drunk alone or, better yet, mixed with wines, beers, or liqueurs for some added bite. Berries are occasionally eaten raw. They can also be dried and mixed into bread dough, cereal, or trail mixes or added to tea.

Future harvests

The berry seeds germinate nicely, though there are always a few duds, so plant a handful for the sake of future human harvests and for the well-being of our winged and four-legged friends.

nodding onion

Allium cernuum

EDIBLE bulbs, leaves

Wild onions have a satisfying and subtle flavor that is reminiscent of chives.

There are actual onions in the hills around us, which smell and taste like the store-bought onions we all know so well. Round or slightly oblong bulbs lie just below grass-like blades. All parts of the plant are tasty. Showy pink flowers burst forward like fireworks, hanging low in the case of nodding onion or standing erect in some of the region's less common *Allium* species. Like many onions, both wild and domesticated, this plant could be grown in both the vegetable garden and the flower garden to good effect.

The showy pink blossoms of nodding onion extend downward, as the name suggests.

Until the arrival of domesticated onions, tribes and early settlers widely gathered these little onions, sometimes traveling long distances to harvest a prime wild patch. The store-bought onion eclipsed its wild relatives because of its larger size and wider availability, but not because of its superior flavor. Wild onions have a satisfying and subtle flavor, unmistakably oniony but seldom harsh, reminiscent of chives. In time, they might once again play a valued role in regional cuisine.

How to identify

Slender perennial from 6 to 20 inches tall, with numerous leafless stems growing alongside long, slender leaves from bunches of bulbs. Umbrella-shaped clusters of white or pink bell flowers droop from stem tops. Onions can be told apart from other slender-bladed plants by their unmistakable onion smell and the pinkish white underground bulb.

Where and when to gather

Nodding onion is most common in rocky areas, including craggy hilltops where soil sits only in cracks and crevices. Onions can also be found in sandy and rocky soils in open forests or forest clearings. Nodding onion's long, thin leaves are visible in spring and most persist through summer, but they are generally tastiest in the late spring when they are still fresh but are approaching their full size. Bulbs may be harvested at any time, but are best in autumn, when the foliage dies back and the plant redirects sugars to its bulb. A few wild onions (though not the nodding onion) lose their foliage in summer, making the bulbs hard to find. Traditionally, Northwestern tribes seeking these onions placed sticks in the ground when the foliage was visible, so that the bulbs could be readily found in autumn.

How to gather

Onion bulbs can be excavated from the soil, sometimes with a gentle tug of the leaves, or by loosening the soil with a trowel or digging stick. Leaf blades can be picked, leaving the bulb in place. Because the total removal of leaves compromises the plant, consider taking only a portion.

How to eat

The whole plant is aromatic and, with the exception of tough flower stalks or wilting greens, is good when eaten. Bulbs can be used raw or cooked, like any onion bulb. Both bulbs and leaf blades can be chopped and used in a manner similar to scallions or green onions.

Although wild onion bulbs are small and thin, they are often more colorful than and have all the flavor of onions twice their size.

Future harvests

Many patches of wild onions are in sensitive habitats, and gathering should never be attempted if it seems likely to extirpate a patch of any size. These onions happily proliferate when bulbs are planted. They do well in gardens, but outside of their usual haunts may require a bit of tending, mostly to keep competing plants from overtopping and shading them out, a vulnerability that explains the onion’s predilection for rough and rocky landscapes. Wild onions will form large and sustainable colonies of bulbs that can be culled for culinary purposes with time and tending. Once the flowers have died back, seeds can be gathered from the flower stalks. Scatter some close to the original patch, but feel free to try a few in appropriately sunny habitats elsewhere in the area.

oak

Quercus garryana (Oregon white oak, Garry oak)

Quercus kelloggii (California black oak)

EDIBLE acorns

Acorns add a distinctively nutty, sweet flavor to breads and porridges, and some harvesters now use them in ice cream, sauces, and beverages as well.

Dangling from oaks in the drier interior valleys west of the Cascades, acorns can be found decorating some of the region's most stately trees. Once a staple food of Native Americans wherever they were found in large numbers, acorns are the principal ingredient in a surprisingly diverse assortment of vaguely sweet and nutty-flavored breads and porridges. Acorns have been part of the human diet for millennia in Europe and Asia, and they are still important to some Native American tribes as well as in Korean cuisine. Native peoples of the Northwest so prized these nuts that they burned the ground to produce oak savannahs where Oregon white and California black oaks were the only significant tree. These unique ecosystems are rapidly disappearing as cities and farms overrun the region's interior valleys and Native burning has ceased.

Mature oaks, their broad lateral branches dotted with acorns, still stand in prairie clearings in the drier interior valleys of western Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia.

How to identify

Oregon white oak is a short-trunked tree with a dense, rounded, broadly spreading crown of stout branches. Bark is light gray or whitish, scaly, and thin or furrowed into broad ridges. Deeply lobed, round-edged leaves are 3 to 6 inches long, shiny dark green above, light green and hairy beneath. The acorn is round to oval and about 1 inch long. Similar in many ways, the smaller California black oak has leaves that are sharply pointed at the edges and bark that is black and heavily ridged.

Where and when to gather

Oregon white oak can be found in the rain shadows of the Willamette Valley, Puget Sound area, and around the southern Strait of Georgia. California black oak is found in the interior valleys of southwestern Oregon

and southward. Acorn harvesting is usually best in autumn, as the year’s acorns begin to fall from the tree.

How to gather

Harvesters can usually gather freshly fallen acorns from the ground, though it is possible to shake branches to release acorns’ grip. Individual picking is tricky, but not impossible. Choose acorns that readily fall from the branch with little provocation. Avoid all acorns with visible insect holes.

Oregon white oaks bear large and round acorns, and the lobes of their leaves have signature round edges.

How to eat

Dry gathered acorns, ideally in a dry, well-ventilated area, for several days before cracking their hulls. They will keep. Traditionally, Native Americans might allow the acorns to dry for a year or more in well-aerated caches before processing. Cull any acorns with black, shrunken, or wormy nuts. Soak hulled acorns in water to leach tannins, tossing out and replacing water each day for no less than two days, and ideally more. As an

alternative to leaching, cooking for a long period at a low temperature can also reduce the bitterness of tannins. The interior nut is typically ground—coarsely if it is to be used in porridge or finely if it is to be baked into breads. Sequencing can vary: leaching can occur before or after grinding, as can roasting. Just don’t let wet meal sit around for long or it will spoil. Experimentation with alternative recipes such as pancakes and cakes, with acorn meal as the principal flour or as supplemental flavoring, has yielded good results. Some harvesters now use acorns in ice cream, sauces, beverages, and many other applications, where it adds a distinctively nutty, sweet flavor.

Oak leaves and acorns litter the ground below the impressive oak canopy. Look for acorns that are freshly dropped and bug-free when gathering at ground level.

Future harvests

Acorns do not travel on the wind, so they rely on animals, such as squirrels and jays, to move them around. Please do your part. Gather and rebury acorns in strategic locations. Harvesters can also transplant volunteer

seedlings. Layering, securing low-lying branches against the ground and burying partially in soil, will cause the branch to develop roots, and then it can be cut and planted elsewhere. One of the biggest challenges to modern native oaks is urban encroachment and the overgrowth of vegetation in the absence of Native American burning. Do your part by protecting good oak habitat or clearing back competing plants from good acorn-producing trees.

Oregon grape

Mahonia aquifolium (tall Oregon grape)

Mahonia nervosa (dull-leafed Oregon grape)

EDIBLE berries

Oregon grape berries, which are sour with spicy and grape-like overtones, are increasingly popular in jams, jellies, and other sweetened concoctions.

With shiny, thorny, deep green leaves, bright yellow flowers, and edible dusty blue berries, Oregon grape should be widely known to Northwesterners. It is the Oregon state flower and a mainstay of regional landscape plantings to boot. There are, in fact, two Oregon grapes: the tall Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) and the dull-leafed Oregon grape (*M. nervosa*). Both are uncommonly useful plants, with sour but edible berries and bright yellow roots that are popular for medicinal preparations and the production of natural dyes.

How to identify

Shrubby, erect evergreen from 2 to 10 feet tall. Leaves, in sprays of nine to nineteen, are stiff and shiny, with undulating margins armed with stiff, spiny points; leaves turn rust-purple in winter. Yellow flowers are borne densely in erect clusters and develop into tight elongated clusters of small dusty blue berries.

Shiny dark green leaves, their margins bristling with spikes, stand guard beside bunches of soft dusty blue Oregon grape berries.

Where and when to gather

Tall Oregon grape is found widely in the Northwest in dry, open country, whereas the shorter dull-leafed Oregon grape is found mostly in the forest understory west of the Cascades. Both thrive in rich but well-drained soils. Berries generally ripen from late spring through summer.

How to gather

Berries can be picked one by one. Because the berries grow in tight clusters and the foliage and stems of the plant are quite durable, it is possible to pluck berries in handfuls from the plant.

How to eat

Oregon grape berries are quite sour, with spicy and grape-like overtones, but some intrepid souls like to eat them fresh from the bush. They can be

mixed with other berries to offset this effect, and Oregon grape berries are increasingly popular in jams, jellies, and other sweetened concoctions. Seeds are large, so these will need to be removed for most culinary uses with a food mill or equivalent.

Future harvests

The large seeds, spat strategically or gathered with a food mill, can help establish or expand colonies of Oregon grape when worked gently into the duff. Cuttings from the plant, taken during the summer berry gathering season and placed into the soil, sometimes can take root and form new plants.

oval-leafed blueberry and Alaska blueberry

Vaccinium alaskaense (Alaska blueberry)

Vaccinium ovalifolium (oval-leafed blueberry, gray blueberry, oval-leaved bilberry)

EDIBLE berries

Some patches of these wild blueberries are tastier than any you might find at the store.

Deep in the forests of the Northwest one can sometimes find these big wild blueberries, looking and tasting somewhat like their domesticated kin. Flavors vary from patch to patch and are not always great, but in some patches these wild blueberries are tastier than any cultivar you might find at the store. Some botanists have categorized the Alaska and oval-leafed blueberries as separate species, and others consider them to be two geographically distinct populations of the same species, differentiated by subtle differences in taste, color, leaf shape, and fruiting time. Still, their basic structure and flavors are quite similar. With leaves arranged in elegant sprays, the branches reach upward through the understory tangle to capture dappled sunlight, suspending pink urn-shaped flowers that slowly develop into very dark blue, juicy berries. The berries are popular wherever they are gathered.

Like domestic blueberries in look and taste, the big berries of oval-leafed blueberry offer the promise of an impromptu snack in shadowy forests.

How to identify

Deciduous mid-sized spreading shrub with bluntly rounded oval leaves, paler on undersides, carried on woody stems. Little round urn-shaped flowers range from white to pinkish green or bronze and develop into bluish black berries, often with a light waxy-white coating that makes them look just a little lighter than the berry skin below.

Where and when to gather

These blueberries can be found in high-elevation forests, as well as occasionally in damp sites at low elevation. In many parts of the region, they do not survive well in the glare and exposure of clearcut forests, so they tend to lurk only in the remaining patches of old forest or in protected, shady riparian areas. Gather through summer and into very early autumn.

How to gather

Pick berries individually. The berries grow in such tight clusters, though, that one can sometimes pick handfuls at a time.

How to eat

Often (but not always) outstanding fresh, these two blueberries also makes excellent pies, preserves, sauces, and beverages.

Future harvests

A few berries worked into the soil matrix will often sprout on suitable sites. Cuttings also root readily. One worthy task for harvesters is to aid this plant in reoccupying areas from which it has been extirpated by the effects of industrial forestry.

oxalis

Oxalis oregana

redwood sorrel, wood sorrel, Oregon oxalis

EDIBLE leaves, stems

The stems and leaves have a tart appley flavor and can be tossed into a batch of greens to give the mix some tanginess.

Oxalis carpets the forest floor each spring with bright green leaves in an oversized clover configuration with candy-striped flowers. Despite its clover-shaped leaves, this is an altogether different plant, with its own unique flavor and aesthetic. Some hikers chew the stems and leaves of oxalis for its tart appley flavor, spitting the residuals unceremoniously along the trail, but the plant is gaining popularity as an addition to greens served in more refined settings. Oxalis is also becoming a popular groundcover in Northwestern gardens, lending an invitingly green and edible tartness to backyard landscapes.

How to identify

Dainty, ground-hugging perennial composed of numerous stalks, each topped by three heart-shaped leaves, with the narrow point attached to the stalk. Flowers are borne under the leaves and range from white to pink, often with reddish stripes.

With triple leaves and candy-striped flowers, oxalis forms carpets of large shamrocks on the forest floor.

Where and when to gather

Moist but well-drained forest floors are best, in places that are shady but with moments of dappled sunlight. Stems and leaves are best gathered in spring, when they are freshly sprouting from the forest floor.

How to gather

Oxalis is usually picked close to the base of the stem, just above the ground.

How to eat

The stems are the most flavorful part of the plant, but the leaves have their devotees as well. Many harvesters choose to chew the plant for its juice and spit out the rest. You can also toss a few oxalis leaves into a batch of greens to give the mix some tanginess. The earlier in the season the stems and

leaves are gathered, the more tender they will be for such culinary experiments.

Future harvests

Oxalis typically grows in patches from shared roots. Harvesting a few plants selectively from a patch will not affect it much, but do resist any urge to mow down large areas. Root segments can be transplanted to good effect, especially late in the gathering season as the foliage begins to die back.

Warnings

As the name implies, oxalis contains oxalic acid and, if consumed in especially large quantities, can cause digestive discomfort.

Pacific waterleaf

Hydrophyllum tenuipes

EDIBLE leaves, roots

Leaves make a passably sweet cooked green.

This attractively ephemeral plant appears each spring, raising its large lacy leaves and delicately diffuse purple flowers to capture dim forest floor light. Other waterleaf species are popular wild food plants in other parts of the country, but Pacific waterleaf has only a very small following in the Northwest. Though a bit fuzzy on their surface, the leaves of this plant make a passably sweet springtime cooked green, worthy of broader attention and experimentation.

How to identify

A leafy herbaceous perennial with soft, hairy stems, 8 to 12 inches tall. Large, thin, softly hairy leaves, lighter on the underside, and divided into five pointed and coarsely toothed segments. Flowers greenish white to purple, borne in compact clusters at the ends of the stalks, set off by protruding white-tipped anthers.

The diffuse, compound flower of Pacific waterleaf is composed of multiple tiny flowers, held together by a series of delicate green stalks.

A fuzzy central stalk holds up Pacific waterleaf’s soft and deeply serrated leaves, with complex terminal flowers of white to purple.

The leafy fingers of Pacific waterleaf emerge in small clusters on the forest floor in late winter and early spring, presenting harvesters with the tastiest and most tender leaves available from this plant.

Where and when to gather

Waterleaf appears in moist forests, typically on the edges or in open areas where dappled sunlight reaches for part of the day. The new leaves of spring are best, as they are softer and sweeter than the mature leaves of summer.

How to gather

Pick leaves from the stalks and ground as they appear in spring, focusing on the softer and most brightly green leaves.

How to eat

A little too fuzzy to be pleasant when raw, Pacific waterleaf is best mixed into cooked greens with suitable seasonings to taste. The roots are edible, but there are few reports of how to best gather or use them. Please do experiment and share your results.

Future harvests

Seed capsules containing only a few seeds each appear in autumn and can be redistributed to suitably shady moist sites. Cuttings of rooted sections of the lateral underground rhizomes can also be propagated effectively.

pickleweed

Salicornia pacifica

American glasswort, Pacific saltwort, samphire, sea asparagus, sea beans

EDIBLE stems

In addition to being tasty fresh, stems can be pickled in vinegar, cooked with seafood, and steamed as a salty analogue to asparagus.

Out on the tidal flats, growing where briny waters rise and fall each day, there live sprawling colonies of pickleweed, an essentially leafless and fleshy plant with a look, taste, and toothiness that vaguely suggests thin pickles. Appropriately enough, the plant is succulent, retaining a balanced mixture of salt and water internally so that it might survive wide variations in temperature, salinity, and moisture over the course of a single day in the tidelands. Various species of pickleweed can be found around the globe, and they are used widely for food and other uses. For example, the name glasswort reflects its historical use in British glass manufacturing. In recent times this plant has gained some popularity among specialty food enthusiasts, being pickled, steamed, chopped, and fried in innovative new dishes.

How to identify

Small matting perennial with tough outer skin that protects the plump juicy stems. Leaves are practically nonexistent and flowers are tiny, rendering the thick, flowering, green to brownish purple stems as the main visible part of the plant.

Where and when to gather

Pickleweed grows in estuaries throughout the Pacific Northwest, where freshwater rivers and streams enter saltwater inlets and the sea. Look in the middle tide range, roughly halfway between the treeline and the bare sand

and mudflats. Pickleweed can be gathered over much of the year, but the fresh young growth, commonly appearing in spring and early summer, is tastiest.

How to gather

Pick the newer segments emerging from living plants, or pick entire plants at their base. (Groups of plants are connected to one another by roots under the soil, so picking an entire plant or two from a colony usually does little harm.) The tiny flowers can be removed by running fingers up and down any flowering stalks.

How to eat

Pickleweed is just fine when fresh, whether eaten in the field or mixed into salads, but cooked recipes are becoming quite popular. The stems are pickled in vinegar, cooked with seafood, and steamed as a salty analogue to asparagus, to name just a few options.

Standing upright in salty marshes, pickleweed grows with thick, succulent stems that are segmented and lacking proper leaves.

Future harvests

The estuarine habitats where pickleweed grows have been badly degraded, with over 90 percent of suitable estuarine lands on the coasts of Oregon and Washington and the interior waters of southern British Columbia being filled or diked. Defending the remaining habitat and supporting its restoration may be key to ensuring future harvests. Pickleweed rhizome sections can be transplanted to newly disturbed or freshly deposited marsh

soils and are a good choice for estuarine restoration sites. Seeds set in small bladder-shaped sacs on the pickleweed stalk can also be gathered and transported to suitable intertidal sites, but gather sparingly, as extensive seed gathering may compromise local populations.

pine

Pinus contorta (lodgepole pine, shore pine)

Pinus lambertiana (sugar pine)

Pinus ponderosa (ponderosa pine)

EDIBLE inner bark, seeds

Pine cambium is so sweet that Native peoples have commonly thought of it as a dessert food.

In the interior Northwest, pines are especially widespread. Among them is the ponderosa pine, with its corky mosaics of reddish brown bark and chunky, spiky-bracted cones. Its slender relative, the lodgepole pine, can be a shrub in mountain and coastal settings, while growing into a tall tree in the interior. Growing in the southern Cascades and patchily within the Klamath Range, sugar pine is the only pine in the region with long narrow cones 1 to 2 feet in length; seeds are about 1/2 inch in length, with a thin detachable wing.

Regrettably, the Northwest is not so blessed with pine nuts as the regions to the south and southeast. All pines in our area produce nuts that are technically edible, but those of the most common pines are so small and lacking in flavor that there is little incentive to harvest them. On the southern end of the Cascade Range, the gathering options become more interesting, with sugar pine appearing here and there with its giant cones containing big, nutritious nuts. Native Americans living in sugar pine country traditionally had long poles to knock cones loose and specialized hats to deflect the big cones and pitch that tumbled down during a successful nut harvest. Dislodged from their cones, the seeds of the sugar pine are outstanding fresh or roasted.

The moist cambium, the soft inner bark of the tree lying just on top of the wood, is edible in many trees, including lodgepole and ponderosa pines. Most cambium, when gathered in season, is sweet and has a predictably

pitchy flavor. Cambium can serve as a food in lean times, but it is so sweet that Native peoples have commonly thought of it as a dessert food.

How to identify

Mostly on the coast, where it is also known as shore pine, lodgepole pine is an evergreen shrub (often roughly 10 feet tall) or a tree in the Northwest interior (up to 160 feet). The dark shiny needles, 1 1/2 to 3 inches long, are borne in pairs. Cones, about 1 to 3 inches long, have prickles on the scales, and the bark is brown, rough, and scaly. Ponderosa pine is an evergreen tree reaching 90 feet in height. Needles are 3 to 5 inches long with three (rarely two or four) in a bundle, and pineapple-shaped cones are 3 to 6 inches long. Bark is dark brown to nearly black when young and turns from cinnamon brown to orange-yellow with age. Sugar pine is the largest species of pine, commonly growing to 130 to 200 feet, with long straight branches that are weighed down at the tips by the cones, which range from about 1 to 2 feet in length. Needles, 2 to 4 inches long, are in bundles of five.

Needles bundled densely together in twos and tightly packed little cones are signs of the lodgepole or shore pine.

Bundled together in sets of three, long pointed ponderosa pine needles encircle large, prickly cones with a bushy halo.

Where and when to gather

Lodgepole and ponderosa pines are especially numerous on the eastern slopes of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, and become the dominant conifer in many areas east of these ranges. Shore pine (*Pinus contorta* subsp. *contorta*) is generally found near the coast, whereas sugar pines are found in the southern Cascade Range into the Sierra Nevada. Shore pine cones can be gathered for their seeds in the very late summer and autumn. Cambium is ideally peeled in spring, as the sap begins to flow in the tree, allowing it to be easily removed and lending it additional sweetness and nutritional value. Cambium gathering in other times of the year, motivated by hunger, is possible but much more difficult; trees do not give up their bark willingly and will show signs of a struggle for many years to come.

How to gather

Look for seed-bearing cones, so mature that their woody scales are opening to reveal the nuts and their little helicopter wings within; such cones can be gathered from the ground, though they are often best when knocked from the tree. Drying cones in a warm place will cause them to open more, revealing seeds within. Seeds can be plucked by hand, but tools such as pliers can make this a faster job. Sugar pine is rewarding, but the nuts of other Northwestern pines are so small, the process so labor intensive, that some harvesters may quickly lose interest.

Cambium gathering is a tricky business, usually involving the use of tools such as a hatchet or machete to remove a section of hard outer bark of the tree and then scrape the soft cambium from the space between the outer bark and the interior wood. It typically comes off the tree in juicy sheets in spring or uncooperative pitchy hunks at other times of the year.

How to eat

Fresh or roasted, pine nuts can be eaten in any way that commercial pine nuts are employed: in pesto, salads, confections, as a table nut, and myriad other ways. Cambium can be eaten straight from the tree like a gummy snack. Native peoples have traditionally mixed pulverized cambium with berries into a sort of cake or porridge. Most tree cambium can be stored for long periods of time, either intact or pulverized into cakes, often being dried and later reconstituted with water.

Future harvests

Pines are widespread but can be reseeded or seedlings replanted in suitable sites to sustain harvestable patches. It is good form to not harvest all nuts from an area, because birds, squirrels, and many other critters great and small share an affinity for the nuts, and some depend on caches of them for survival through winter.

Cambium harvesting should be done sparingly, if at all, for the rewards are modest and the impacts on the tree are great. Traditional harvesters usually take cambium from no more than one-quarter the diameter of the tree, and only a few feet high, to avoid killing the tree outright.

Warnings

People with nut allergies are often sensitive to pine nuts as well.

Conifers

With soft needles and little mouse-tail appendages sticking out from the cone, Douglas-fir is among the most common and recognizable trees in the Northwest.

The bright green needle buds of most conifers are edible. Just as they lose their brownish orange bud scales, tight little clusters of juvenile needles appear each spring. Especially on Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) and Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), these little clusters of undeveloped needles are palatable, with a piney-citrusy taste that hints at their richness in vitamin C and other nutrients. Conifer needle buds can be picked from trees almost like berries. Those of the spruces

are sometimes used to partially or wholly replace hops in beers, giving a bitter but fruity conifer bite to the brew.

New needles developing on fir trees, as on this grand fir, are long, lateral, and brilliantly green.

Although conifers define and often dominate the regional landscape, they are seldom thought of as a source of food. Yet most coniferous trees in the region are, in fact, partially edible. This does not mean that wild food harvesters should delve, beaver-like, into a fine meal of logs and sawdust. Instead, we look to the nutritious softer bits of the trees that present themselves at different times of the year.

As they mature, conifer needles make outstanding tea ingredients, whether alone or in delicious combinations with mint and other wild-harvested ingredients, steeped to a strength of your choosing over the course of a few hours. Be careful not to boil or cook the needles, as they become bitter and lose a lot of the bright flavors that make them so appealing. The needles of Douglas-fir, with brilliant lemony notes,

might be the most popular, but spruces, pines, and western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) provide very good tea needles, too. The more brightly colored young needles are generally the tastiest, but even older dry ones will work; some people even make teas from the needles of Christmas trees and other winter greenery. Wash needles well in cold water before letting them steep. Some harvesters chop the needles to intensify the flavor, but others do not. Experiment to find your preference.

The needles of the towering western hemlock are soft and short, and its oblong cones are tiny, with flexible lobed scales.

The moist cambium, the soft inner bark of the tree lying just on top of the wood, is also edible in many Northwestern trees. Native peoples traditionally harvested cambium from conifers such as the western hemlock on the coast, several firs in mountainous areas, and pines in the interior. When gathered in spring, most cambium is sweet and has a pitchy flavor. Conifer cambium has been used as a kind of starvation food, but it is also so sweet in some species, such as the pines, that

Native peoples have commonly thought of it as a dessert food. Pulverized or shredded cambium is often mixed with berries into a sort of cake or porridge. Most cambium can be stored for long periods of time, usually being dried and later reconstituted with water.

Mature fir needles, such as on this balsam fir, extend horizontally from each stem.

The soft, scaly foliage of western red cedar sets it apart from its pokier, needle-leaved conifer relatives.

Ideally, cambium is peeled in spring, as the sap begins to flow in the tree, allowing it to be easily removed and lending it additional sweetness and nutritional value. Cambium is conventionally removed by chipping away the hard outer bark and then using a knife or similar tool to cut the edges and peel or scrape sections of the soft inner bark from the tree.

Cambium removal is difficult at times other than spring, when the sap is dormant, and trees subjected to off-season cambium peeling often bear the marks of a struggle. Finally, be selective and respectful in your bud and needle harvests, taking only a little from each tree, to minimize lasting negative effects on tree health and personal karma.

pipsissewa

Chimaphila umbellata

prince’s pine, umbellate wintergreen

EDIBLE leaves, stems

Added to tea and beverages, pipsissewa imparts a pleasantly sweet taste with hints of cola and Chinese black tea.

Pipsissewa is a charming little plant, with its spokes-on-a-wheel whorl of shiny, tooth-edged leaves and nodding pink bell flowers. One would hardly expect that this diminutive plant, growing inconspicuously in the sunny dapples on the forest floor, could be of such value. When added to tea and beverages, it imparts a pleasantly sweet taste with hints of cola and Chinese black tea. The brand name Pepsi reflects the historical use of this plant in commercial drinks (formerly in Pepsi, and still in a lot of root beers) as well as candies. Pipsissewa tea is widely touted for its health benefits by Native and non-Native healers, with the former often drinking it seasonally to ward off illness, and the latter carrying out various experiments to understand its benefits. Whatever its medicinal virtues, it is a tasty addition to native Northwestern cuisine.

How to identify

Dwarf evergreen shrub with stout erect stems, 5 to 10 inches tall. Leaves are leathery and narrowly oblong with toothed edges. Thick, waxy, bell-shaped flowers, 1/2 inch wide, range from creamy pink to rose and droop in loose clusters on a tall, leafless stalk.

Where and when to gather

Pipsissewa is widespread in conifer forests, especially in mountainous areas such as the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, commonly on humus-rich,

well-drained slopes. Leaf gathering can take place almost year-round, but is best in summer, when new leaves develop.

How to gather

Pick individual leaves from living plants or whole living plants from larger colonies.

Little whorls of pipsissewa leaves, elongated and with serrated edges, rise from the forest floor on stout stems.

How to eat

Leaves or plants can be used fresh or dried for storage. Teas and other beverages are best made by boiling the leaves; experiment with quantities of leaves, water, and time to find the right potency for your chosen use. Similar methods can be used to make the extract historically used in beverages and candies.

Future harvests

Seed capsules can be found atop the main central stalk of pipsissewa in late summer and autumn. Seeds can be redistributed to suitable sites and worked into the humus-rich soil. In larger colonies, individual plants, which are attached to others by creeping, underground rhizomes, can be cut away and planted elsewhere, ideally with a small amount of the surrounding soil matrix as the plants go dormant in autumn. Pipsissewa does not thrive away from conifer forest cover due to complex symbiotic associations with the trees.

prickly currant

Ribes lacustre

black gooseberry, black swamp gooseberry, swamp currant, swamp gooseberry, prickly gooseberry

EDIBLE berries

Tart and very juicy, these berries are especially good fresh.

One finds this water-loving currant dwelling along the shorelines of lakes, bogs, and streams, often on rotting logs or other rich humus. Bushes ranging from knee- to head-height are covered with an alarmingly dense profusion of small yellowish thorns as well as tiny five-lobed maple-like leaves. In spring, clusters of tiny cup-shaped white to red flowers appear, dangling on short stems; in summer these transform into dark purple to nearly black berries covered in small bristles. They are tart and very juicy and are especially good fresh. Make sure that they are as big, soft, and ripe as possible before picking, as they masquerade as ripe for some time before the real thing happens. Guides that deride prickly currant as “unpalatable” often reference underripe berries without knowing it. Widely used by Native American communities of the coastal zone as a food plant, prickly currant is also reputed to have a wide range of medicinal uses involving berries, leaves, roots, twigs, and bark.

How to identify

Upright to spreading shrub with leggy branches and stems covered in yellowish spines. Five-lobed maple-like leaves are about 2 inches across. Small white to red flowers with pale edges dangle in loose clusters of five to fifteen on hanging stalks and develop into hairy dark berries.

Where and when to gather

Prickly currant is almost always found near water, as its several “swampy” common names attest. Look for it along lakes, bogs, and streams, especially

where sunlight illuminates rotting logs or richly organic soils. Berries ripen through summer, with timing varying depending on latitude, elevation, and light exposure.

How to gather

Berries can be picked one by one or in handfuls. Ripe berries are often plump and very slightly softer than unripe berries of similar size. The taste improves long after the berry has reached its full size as it ripens, so eat a few of the larger berries to compare characteristics.

Prickly currant is known by its hairy dark purple to black berry, with a tart juicy flavor all its own.

How to eat

These currants are juicy and tart when fresh, sweetening gradually on the cane if they are not eaten by birds first. The berries often smell less

appealing than they taste, so bear this in mind when developing recipes. Cooked berries work well in sauces, jams, and preserves and are sometimes mixed with other berries for such uses as pies.

Future harvests

Berries tend to propagate well, and seeds are viable for many years after the berry is picked, so there are many opportunities to seed prickly currant in suitable sites. Cuttings often propagate successfully, and volunteer seedlings can be salvaged, especially if moved with a lot of the underlying organic-rich soil intact. In some settings, such as on large areas of wet but disturbed ground, prickly currant has become invasive, so plant with care.

Warnings

When eaten in large quantities, some wild currants have a mild laxative quality. Avoid the thorns as you pick, as they can irritate some harvesters' skin.

red currant

Ribes triste

northern redcurrant, wild redcurrant

EDIBLE berries

These berries are crunchy and sweet, but with a persistent tart edge.

Red currant is a little ankle- to knee-height shrub that sports bright green, fuzzy leaves and has no thorns on its stems. With dangling strings of smooth-skinned brilliant red berries, this cold-weather currant provides welcome berries even in forbidding places, from mountain forest clearings to the tundra margins. Often sweet and crunchy but with a persistent tart edge, the berry has a flavor on the cranberry end of the grape spectrum. They are very good fresh or cooked.

How to identify

Small deciduous shrub, branches smooth and loosely arching. Bright green, slightly fuzzy maple-like leaves are mostly three- to five-lobed. Flowers are arranged in drooping purplish clusters and develop into bright red berries.

Where and when to gather

Happily occupying places with cool temperatures and moderate moisture, red currant is found mostly in the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, interior British Columbia, and Alaska. Berries appear by late spring to summer, depending upon elevation and latitude.

How to gather

Berries can be picked one by one or strings of ripe berries can be gathered by the handful.

How to eat

When eaten fresh, red currant provides a bright and juicy balance between sweetness and tartness. When cooked, it gives a cranberry to grape flavor to jams, pies, fruit leathers, and many other foods. This currant is sometimes used to good effect in wines and other beverages.

Future harvests

Do not harvest all berries in an area, but leave a few behind to reseed the ground below or for birds to distribute more broadly. Toss extra berries in places with suitable growing conditions, similar to those of the maternal patch. Seeds can be spat strategically from berries eaten fresh, and uncooked berries from food processing may be planted at suitable sites as well. Transplantation of seedlings is generally possible, especially when the plant is dormant and the ground is not frozen.

A small currant of colder climes, the red currant sports small maple-like leaves and translucent, radiantly red berries.

red huckleberry

Vaccinium parvifolium

EDIBLE berries

The berries are bright, tart, and tasty when ripe, with flavors reminiscent of cranberry.

Red huckleberries can be found throughout the Northwest. In summer, the medium-sized bushes are ornamented with small pink to red orbs. The berries are bright, tart, and tasty when ripe, with flavors more reminiscent of its cranberry relatives than those of its purple huckleberry kin. At certain times and places, red huckleberry is the most abundant food plant to be found.

How to identify

Erect deciduous shrub, 3 to 12 feet tall, with strongly angled, bright green, pliable branches. Thin, oval, light green leaves turn red or purplish in autumn. Pinkish urn-shaped flowers hang singly from bases of leaves and develop into bright red berries.

Where and when to gather

Red huckleberry is widespread in the Northwest, being especially abundant in partially shaded forests atop rotting wood or soil rich in organic material. The berries are among the first huckleberries to arrive in the region’s forests. They sometimes develop as early as late spring, and a good bush can keep producing well into early autumn.

How to gather

Berries can be picked one by one. The bigger and darker berries on an individual bush are generally riper, but this varies considerably. Because they are small and numerous and the stems and leaves of red huckleberry

are flexible, Native American harvesters traditionally use berry rakes, small wooden contraptions that are combed through the foliage while berries are caught below. Lacking one of these fine devices, your five fingers can be run gently through the foliage instead.

How to eat

Red huckleberries are a little acidic and only subtly sweet, but they are still great fresh—even kids will eat large quantities directly from the bush. The berries are also popular in baked goods, syrups, jams, pies, and other foods needing bright berry flavor.

Future harvests

Red huckleberries are typically numerous on individual bushes, so most harvesters are happy to scatter a few and work them into the soil.

Red huckleberry is shaped like a small blueberry, but pink to red in color and pleasantly tart. The berries dot pliable-branched bushes with light green oval leaves.

salal

Gaultheria shallon

EDIBLE berries

Berries have a flavor reminiscent of Concord grapes and are probably best eaten directly from the bush.

With a deep purple color and a flavor to match, salal should never be overlooked. Some guidebooks describe salal berries as dry or unpalatable. Don’t believe them. Although salal berries vary from place to place and bush to bush, their flavor—often reminiscent of Concord grapes—can rival any wild berry in the Northwest. One of the most important plant staples in the traditional Native American diet, salal was traditionally gathered in vast quantities. The dark, juicy berries were eaten fresh or mashed and dried into fruit leather or thick fruity cakes that lasted throughout the year.

Salal’s appeal goes beyond its berries. Throughout North America, florists prize the plant’s dark, shiny foliage, using it as the greenery of choice for bouquets. Dappled in urn-shaped pink flowers in spring and its foliage bright green year-round, salal is a popular shrub or groundcover in Northwestern gardens. When pruned correctly, mature plants can serve as effective hedgerows. Stems are stiff, and especially where this plant fronts saltwater, salal can grow into impenetrable thickets that one can neither climb over nor under. Fortunately, the berries present themselves on the sunny faces of the bush, where such gymnastics are not required.

How to identify

Vigorous, mostly erect evergreen shrub, 4 feet or taller, with pliable haired stems. Leathery leaves are large, thick, glossy, and oval, with very finely toothed edges. Urn-shaped white or pale to bright pink flowers hang individually from one side of stem tips in large clusters and develop into reddish blue to dark purple berries.

Where and when to gather

Salal can be found in the wetter western forests of the Pacific Northwest. It grows in the understory of low-elevation forests or in shore-edge or rocky clearings, often in sunnier spots; the closer to saltwater, the better your chances of finding a dense and productive patch. Salal berries become ripe, turning soft and dark purple, by mid-summer. Depending on location, some bushes continue to bear fruit into early autumn.

Brilliant pink, urn-shaped salal flowers dangle in delicate rows, in anticipation of harvests yet to come.

How to gather

Salal berries vary in flavor between locations, bushes, and even individual berries on a bush. Harvesters are well advised to take an experimental approach, trying different places at different times until they get a feel for the best salal conditions in their area. The juiciest and tastiest berries are often the biggest ones, gathered on robust bushes in sunny but wet locations. A gentle squeeze will tell you if the berry is good: if it’s hard, it is

not the berry for you; if it’s too squishy to keep a vaguely round shape, odds are good that it is overripe.

How to eat

Be sure to rinse salal berries before eating them, as the deep recesses at their base can harbor insects and other passengers better than most berries. Soaking is an even better way to rid the berry of all its invertebrate passengers, who cling to these berries with great affection. For travelers on the go, simply squeeze the berry at the point where the stem enters its top; the thick sepal flaps on the opposite end of the berry will expand and allow you to see (and, if needed, shake loose) any bugs that might be discovered. With a little experimentation, this maneuver will become second nature to you.

Amid waxy oval leaves, deep purple salal berries grow in rows, with their round exterior punctuated by an X-shaped opening on the bottom end.

Salal berries are probably best when eaten one by one from the bush. Native harvesters have formed the mashed berries—mixed with seeds, nuts, other berries, and even meats—into cakes resembling modern energy bars. You can treat salal as you would blueberries or raspberries, using them to make jam, syrup, or pies. A pulverized berry paste, spread atop skunk cabbage leaves or wax paper and left to dry, is both a tasty and traditional way to make fruit leather.

Future harvests

Harvesters might choose to scatter a few berries on the ground near productive wild berry patches to ensure the long-term viability of this wild crop. Transplanting is not recommended. Salal stems can be brittle, and transplantation must be done delicately, if at all, to avoid breaking the main stem at its contact point with the roots. Seeds scattered in well-watered Northwestern yards sometimes yield new plants.

salmonberry

Rubus spectabilis

EDIBLE berries, shoots

Salmonberry flavors range from bright, fruity, and citrusy to deep and earthy with spicy notes.

Salmonberry provides us with juicy and brilliantly colored berries, subtly fruity in flavor and splashing the springtime forest with color. Emerging from magenta flowers, the berries' colors span the spectrum from bright orange to a deep and dark purplish red. The flavors are similarly diverse, from bright, fruity, and citrusy to deep and earthy with spicy notes. The texture of this berry tends toward watery softness, but with considerable variety depending on its ripeness and abundant seeds that add a pervasive crunch. In autumn and winter these plants shed their leaves, leaving a dense tangle of peeling brown canes. New stem growth, which appears in early to mid-spring, is green, flexible, and quite tasty.

The berries were named because they ripened at the same time as the arrival of spring Chinook salmon runs on the lower Columbia River. There, Native American communities ate these berries in combination with salmon meat and roe, but also used the berries in rituals that served to honor this beneficent fish. Salmonberries are still the center of important berry-picking traditions to Northwesterners, Native and non-Native, and are eaten enthusiastically alongside other wild foods of spring.

Brilliant magenta to pink flowers appear early in the season, heralding the imminent arrival of salmonberries in Northwestern forests.

Similar to blackberries in shape, if not in color, most salmonberries dot the understory bushes with golden orange.

How to identify

Deciduous erect or leaning shrub, up to 12 feet tall, with weakly prickled stems. Compound leaves are composed of three sharply toothed leaflets that are broadly oval, pointed at the tip, and rounded at the base, with dense, fine white hairs on the undersides. Pink to magenta flowers, about 1 inch across, are borne in open clusters and develop into yellowish orange or red berries. With its light green leaves, the shrub resembles raspberry and can produce extensive thickets.

Where and when to gather

Salmonberry is happiest in moist places with moderate sunlight, along waterways, on damp and sun-dappled forest floors, and along roadsides and other clearings. In certain years and in the right setting—with ample springtime moisture and afternoon sun—certain patches will grow berries of unusually large size and sweetness. From early to mid-spring, the

flexible green shoots prove that life is stirring beneath the surface of last year’s brown canes. Berries present themselves in late spring and early summer, with some variation between locations and patches.

How to gather

Typically too moist and messy for berry rakes, salmonberries should be picked one by one. Flavors vary between locations, patches, and even individually on a bush. The color and texture of the berry gives clues as to its flavor, but these correlations vary between patches. Generally, berries on the yellow to orange spectrum taste a bit brighter and somewhat sweeter, whereas darker berries are more prone to robust and savory notes. A little experimentation will reveal what variations are found in your area, and a picker can soon determine what colors and textures suggest personally palatable berries. Don’t be discouraged by a first attempt with salmonberry that is not satisfying; you will find one that you like.

How to eat

These berries are best eaten straight from the bush. Eaten fresh, they can also be a good addition to salads and desserts. They are too juicy to preserve in some of the fruit leathers and cakes used for other berries. Some harvesters mix salmonberries in pies, pancakes, or other baked goods, but take their dampness into consideration and adjust recipes accordingly. When used alone, salmonberries can produce a jam with complex but delicate flavor; a food mill can be used to remove seeds. They also can be added to jams with more conventional berries like huckleberry or strawberry.

Salmonberry also appears in a variety of other colors, including brilliant red.

Future harvests

Salmonberries will gladly germinate when scattered casually in moist places, an adaptation that reflects their long history of being dispersed and seeded by birds and mammals. Harvesters are encouraged to toss a few berries in moist clearings, and seeds removed for any salmonberry recipes should be given the same treatment. Transplanting is touchier than one might expect; it is best accomplished when the bush is dormant in winter,

taking an intact root network and trimming back the longest canes to just above major branches or buds.

seaside arrowgrass

Triglochin maritima

EDIBLE leaves, stems

Leaves have a sweet, cucumber-like flavor and consistency.

This short green coastal dweller looks vaguely grassy from a distance, with its thin green blades and central flowering stalk, but up close its leaves and stems are fleshy and seem almost succulent, as is common of salt-tolerant plants on marshy margins. Growing on the edges of estuaries and salt marshes, these plants regulate moisture content and salinity by retaining water in the leaves, which contributes to their sometimes sweet, cucumber-like flavor and consistency. Seaside arrowgrass is underappreciated by modern foragers, but it has been a popular fresh-flavored food for many coastal Native communities for generations.

How to identify

Short perennial with slightly flattened, fleshy leaves that grow in tufts from a thick root base. Stalks of tiny green flowers stand taller than the leaves, from 8 inches to more than 3 feet tall. Flowers may include white or reddish wisps and develop into dry pods, each of which splits into six seed-bearing segments.

Where and when to gather

Gather on the margins of tidal marshes and mudflats, ideally in spring. Fresh-looking leaves on those plants without the tall flower stalks are usually best.

How to gather

Pick the fleshy young leaves close to the base, where they connect to the stalk.

How to eat

The bases of the leaves are best. These are typically eaten raw, either alone or in salads. Repeat boiling has been reported among Native harvesters, suggesting that cooked recipes may require some fussiness for palatability's sake. Experiments with cooking seaside arrowgrass may yet yield rewarding surprises.

Future harvests

Harvest sparingly where not numerous, because small populations are often struggling populations. Leaving a few plants in a cluster untouched can help even larger colonies, which are linked by underground roots, to persist and thrive. Seaside arrowgrass propagates enthusiastically from root segments in appropriate soils. This plant often colonizes freshly disturbed or deposited sediments in marsh environments, making it an excellent plant for the restoration or stabilization of marshes.

The edible fleshy stems of seaside arrowgrass rise in bright green spikes from the grassy tangle of a salt marsh.

seaweed

Macrocystis integrifolia (giant kelp)

Nereocystis luetkeana (bullwhip kelp)

Porphyra abbottiae (red laver seaweed)

Postelsia palmaeformis (sea palm)

EDIBLE leaves, stipes (stems)

Red laver seaweed is traditionally dried into salty, crunchy, dark red crisps. Kelps are tasty fresh, but can also be dried or pickled.

The Pacific Northwest is home to many edible seaweeds. I give only a small taste sample here, mentioning a few that have been most important to harvesters. All of these seaweeds are technically marine algae, not plants, and come in colors of red, brown, and green. There are roughly 150 species of *Porphyra* seaweeds in the world; they are the nori seaweeds used in sushi and other Japanese foods and are the most widely eaten seaweeds in the world. An especially good member of this genus is red laver, an inconspicuous, translucent, purplish red seaweed found in shallow rocky intertidal areas along Northwestern coastlines. Various species of kelp are also edible, including the familiar and extraordinarily long bullwhip kelp, which washes ashore in vast tangled piles after storms and still forms vast underwater kelp forests along the coast. Both the stipe and leaves can be eaten in cut strips, fresh or dried. Sea palm looks like leathery olive green palm trees clinging to the rocks in areas of heavy surf. Giant kelp, with its many flat, oval, and bumpy leaf-like blades on a long central stalk, was an especially important edible kelp in Native cuisine, traditionally being eaten mixed with the little fish eggs laid on its surface by schools of herring.

Clinging to rocks with small, reddish purple blades, red laver seaweed is a common sight on wave-battered rocks at low tide.

The fronds of giant kelp are sometimes eaten along with the fish eggs that adhere to this species' characteristically squiggly ridges.

How to identify

Red laver seaweed has a tiny holdfast (a root-like structure that anchors the plants), is purplish red and nearly transparent, and grows in long, narrow sheets that appear ruffled along the edges.

Resembling clusters of little olive green palm trees, sea palm is best gathered in spring.

Giant kelp, which can reach 200 feet in length, is composed of leaf blades fastened to rounded floats arranged along the terminus of long thin stems (stipes). The gold to rich brown kelp rises from a root-like holdfast.

Sea palm is an olive green to brown seaweed, about 20 inches tall, that resembles a small palm tree. The base of the plant is a root-like holdfast, and the strap-shaped blades that tuft from the top can be 10 inches long.

Bullwhip kelp can reach 100 feet in length. The uppermost portion has an inflated float, 4 to 6 inches in diameter, from which long, strap-shaped,

pliable blades trail in the water. The long, thin, hollow stipe is anchored to rocks with a massive holdfast.

Where and when to gather

Red laver seaweed grows in the lower portion of the intertidal zone in protected waters. Sea palm, giant kelp, and bullwhip kelp grow on rocky shallows in the turbulent Pacific and in deep, free-flowing saltwater channels. Spring is generally the best time for gathering red laver seaweed and sea palm, when they put on new growth and draw nutrients into their tissues. Gather red laver when the blades are no more than about 6 inches long. Beach foraging for giant kelp and bullwhip kelp is often best in autumn and winter, when early storms tear them loose from their rocky footings.

How to gather

Gather seaweeds in unpolluted settings, and wash them thoroughly near the surf to remove sand, little critters, and other hangers-on. Red laver should be harvested selectively, taking only a few pieces from each rock over a large area to avoid localized extirpation. Harvesting giant and bullwhip kelps in their native environment in the roiling surf of the Pacific is challenging at best, but there is no shame in scooping up kelp that has just washed ashore. Some seaweeds are easiest to gather as they wash ashore after winter storms, including the bullwhip kelp and sea palm. Cut from offshore rocks sparingly, if at all, due to both safety and conservation concerns; recreational sea palm harvesting is illegal in some areas, but regulated commercial harvests are not.

How to eat

Seaweed can be air dried or dried with heat, typically lasting up to a year when cured this way. Although good fresh, red laver seaweed is traditionally dried on large racks into crunchy dark red crisps—sometimes called Indian popcorn on the Northwest coast—tasting salty with that characteristic nori taste. Red laver can also be partially dried and then pressed and/or pulverized and dried into nori sheets, sometimes with

flavorings added. Sea palm stipes and bullwhip kelp stipes and bulb sections can be cut into edible strips. Kelps are tasty fresh, but can also be dried or pickled. They are just a little rubbery when fresh, just a bit tough when dried. All of these seaweeds are salty.

Future harvests

Avoid localized overharvesting. Propagation is tricky for non-specialists and even more so in wild settings, so it is not recommended. Moving specimens dislodged by storms or small rocks bearing preferred species to new habitats can occasionally help seed local areas.

Warnings

Seaweeds tend to absorb heavy metals that they are exposed to in the form of water pollution or in processing. Toxicity is rare, but not unheard of, so avoidance of seaweeds from polluted waters is especially recommended.

A long hollow whip with a bulbous tip, bullwhip kelp stands tall in deep water but is commonly tossed in tangled piles on the shoreline after storms.

serviceberry

Amelanchier alnifolia

Saskatoon berry, juneberry, shadbush

EDIBLE fruits, leaves

This fruit is sugar-rich and ferments nicely in wines.

Depending on local conditions, the dusky purple to dark blue fruits of serviceberry vary considerably from place to place and taste to taste, ranging from seedy, mealy, and essentially flavorless micro-raisins to soft, sweet, and juicy fruits with a blueberry to apple flavor. Certain tribal oral traditions suggest that these fruits were used in the creation of humankind, perhaps explaining our own diversity of tastes and textures. In good conditions, these little apple-like pomes are among the sweetest native fruits to be found in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Wherever these mineral-rich fruits are found in numbers, somebody is eating them enthusiastically, whether humans, birds, bugs, or quadrupeds. Arrive early if you want a serving.

The shrub also varies in size, based on local conditions, from knee-height to more than 20 feet, with its oddly attractive bluish green oval leaves sporting finely serrated tips. Showy white flowers are reminiscent of jasmine, adding to the popularity of this species as a garden plant in North America and Europe. So diverse are these plants that botanists' heads spin at the task of categorization, and taxonomic questions linger like bad houseguests. The leaves and twigs are popular with foraging elk, deer, and moose. The wood is springy and sturdy, a traditional material for tools, arrows, and baskets.

How to identify

Deciduous shrub to small tree, with several trunks and smooth dark gray to reddish bark. Thin round to oval leaves are regularly toothed and paler beneath, with some hair. White flowers with five long, narrow petals grow

in clusters at branch ends and develop into 1/2-inch apple-like fruits, dull red to blackish.

Where and when to gather

Serviceberry is scattered but widespread, in rocky sites, thickets, and along the edges of forests—anyplace with good drainage—especially, though not exclusively, on the eastern side of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges or in drier places west of this divide. The fruits shift from reddish pink to dark purple and blue over the summer, indicating their ripeness. Leaves can be gathered at any time, but are best early in the season.

Dangling red and purple fruits peek out from behind serviceberry's oval leaves with finely toothed tips.

How to gather

Pick fruits or leaves one by one.

How to eat

When conditions are right and you encounter a patch of sweet serviceberries, the opportunities seem limitless. In sufficient quantities, the fruit is good in pies, pastries, jams, jellies, hot cereals, or just by itself. The fruit also can be added to less sweet berries and other wild foods to augment the natural sugar content, a traditional use in Native cuisine. The fruits can be dried into good raisins, as long as they are sweet and juicy when picked, or mashed into cakes or fruit leathers. Serviceberry fruit is sugar-rich and ferments nicely in wines. The leaves, with their leafy-berry flavor, can be used fresh or dried for teas.

Future harvests

Serviceberry propagates well from seed, especially if the fruit is eaten and the exposed seed is placed in the ground in autumn or early winter. Seedlings pop up around the base of many a mature plant; when there are several, it is worthwhile to relocate some of these seedlings to suitable sites.

sheep sorrel

Rumex acetosella

sour weed, red sorrel

EDIBLE leaves

Leaves have a tart, almost lemony apple flavor and are very good fresh or cooked.

One of the most important wild plant foods of the Northwest is a weed of Eurasian origin, carried here on the tide of European immigration. Wonderfully edible, sheep sorrel almost certainly grows in lawns and fields near you. Its small arrow-shaped leaves can be gathered nearly year-round, giving a tart, almost lemony apple flavor when eaten fresh or cooked.

Happily occupying meadows and lawns, the small green leaves of sheep sorrel are a common sight, with pointed tips on one end and small side lobes on the other.

How to identify

Erect perennial with slender stems rising from a base of numerous arrow-shaped leaves with a lobe on each side. Red or yellow flowers are carried in loose, narrow clusters on long stalks.

Where and when to gather

An adept invasive weed, sheep sorrel grows throughout the region on disturbed ground or meadows, usually in wet locations with acidic soils and adequate sun. Gathering is best when the leaves are young and fresh. Many appear in spring, but suitable leaves can be found into late autumn and even winter in mild corners of the Northwest. Sheep sorrel becomes increasingly bitter once the flowers bolt, turning this diminutive green plant all leggy and red.

How to gather

Pick leaves from the central stalk.

During the flowering phase, sheep sorrel bolts upward with much drama and red color.

How to eat

Leaves are very good fresh, with a bright and tart flavor that works well in salads and as garnishes. The bright flavors persist when cooked, making sheep sorrel a popular cooked green and soup ingredient. The leaves can be used to make flavorful extracts or beverages—teas when dried and smoothies when pulverized fresh. They can also be used as a curdling agent for cheeses.

Future harvests

Sheep sorrel is doing quite well, thank you. It does not need your help.

Warnings

Like oxalis and other plants with this characteristic tart apple flavor, sheep sorrel contains oxalic acid and can cause stomach upset and other complications if consumed in large quantities.

shepherd’s purse

Capsella bursa-pastoris

EDIBLE leaves, seeds

The young leaves and seeds of this mustard relative have a peppery flavor that is popular with weed-eaters around the globe.

As a plant that specialized in colonizing disturbed lands in its native Europe, shepherd’s purse has enthusiastically followed European peoples as they have spread around the globe, leaving an almost limitless selection of disturbed lands in their wake. The plant has a distinctive look, with flat, triangular fruits—the shepherds’ purses—that develop from white four-petaled flowers. The young leaves and seeds of this mustard relative have a peppery flavor that is popular with weed-eaters worldwide. Even some Native American communities have adopted this introduced edible into their culinary repertoire.

How to identify

Straight, erect stems rise from a base of long, thin leaves that are deeply toothed and lobed. Stem leaves are narrow, oblong, and irregularly toothed. Small white flowers cluster atop long stems and are accompanied by flat, heart-shaped seed pods below.

Where and when to gather

A widespread invasive weed, shepherd’s purse can be found throughout the region on disturbed ground, from meadows to roadsides to gardens and farmed fields. Gathering is best when the leaves are young and fresh, especially in spring. As the season progresses, the pepperiness increases until it can become a bit overbearing. Seed capsules can be gathered in summer and autumn.

How to gather

Pick leaves or strip handfuls of seed capsules from the central stalk.

How to eat

The mildly spicy leaves are good when fresh and are popular in salads. They are also good cooked, used in soups, cooked green mixes, and other dishes. The seeds are often roasted or parched and can be used as a flavorful condiment or mixed into breads or porridges.

Future harvests

Shepherd’s purse is highly invasive and carries fungi that sometimes harm commercial vegetables, so wild propagation is not recommended and garden use should be done with due precautions, if at all.

Shepherd’s purse raises white flowers and triangular to heart-shaped seed capsules skyward on thin stalks, which are encircled by long, lobed dandelion-like leaves on the ground below.

Siberian miner’s lettuce

Claytonia sibirica

candyflower, heart-leaved spring beauty

EDIBLE leaves, flowers, stems

This little plant is almost succulent in texture, often sweet, and on the fruity end of the green spectrum.

Dappling the forest floor with little heart-shaped leaves and delicately candy-striped pink to white flowers, Siberian miner’s lettuce is a joy to see and a joy to eat. Like its oddly circular-leaved relative, *Claytonia perfoliata*, this plant is named for the miners who ate the plants in the Western wildlands in the absence of their usual fare. Every aboveground part of the plant is edible. Siberian miner’s lettuce is juicy in spite of its size and almost succulent in texture, often sweet and on the fruity end of the green spectrum, but with a flavor that varies between places and over time. Compared with other greens, Siberian miner’s lettuce is somewhat distinctive in that the plant often remains pleasantly palatable through much of its growing season, from spring through autumn.

Although comparatively uncommon in the Pacific Northwest, true miner's lettuce (*Claytonia perfoliata*), with distinctive circular leaves, can sometimes be found in warm, moist settings.

In some settings, Siberian miner’s lettuce flowers abandon their candy-striped pretensions and become largely pink.

Siberian miner’s lettuce is sweetest and most palatable in the very late winter and early spring, when fresh leaves emerge on the moist forest floor and flowers have yet to appear.

How to identify

A tender, nearly succulent annual, 5 to 12 inches tall, that is either erect or sprawling. Most of the small, egg-shaped leaves emerge from the base of the plant on their own stems, but the flowering stem has two heart-shaped leaves attached directly to it. Delicate flowers are white or white with pink stripes, and each of the five square-oblong petals has a notch at the tip.

Where and when to gather

Siberian miner’s lettuce grows at low to middle elevations, usually in places that are wet and somewhat shaded. The plant can be gathered from spring through autumn, but is available sooner in the southern and low-elevation portions of the region. The quality of flavor varies between different patches, and the flavor of a particular patch can vary over time, so be sure to experiment and not be discouraged by a randomly bitter bite.

How to gather

Pick leaves, stems, flowers, or entire plants.

How to eat

Siberian miner’s lettuce is best eaten fresh, whether in the field or in salads at home. This plant can be steamed or otherwise cooked for use in green mixes, but it is so small and delicate that cooking times must be brief.

Future harvests

Siberian miner’s lettuce produces tiny black seeds that can be gathered and redistributed when the plant begins looking a bit lanky and weedy. The small but stout root segments can also be transplanted with some success to shady, damp, but well-drained sites.

silverweed

Argentina anserina

EDIBLE roots

When prepared correctly, the roots have a flavor reminiscent of sweet potato.

With dark shiny leaves and a buttercup-like flower, this marsh denizen has a lot going for it. When prepared correctly, the thick taproot has a flavor reminiscent of sweet potato, making it a traditional staple plant food for most coastal tribes of the Northwest. The plant is uniquely adapted to turbulent places; when erosion or siltation creates bare ground along shorelines, silverweed sends reddish rhizomes out with stunning speed to heal the land.

Bright yellow buttercup-like flowers brighten up the serrated and symmetrical leaves of silverweed, while starchy edible roots lie hidden below.

How to identify

Perennial hairy herb that forms flattened mats that expand laterally with long runners and rhizomes. Compound leaves are made up of large leaflets interspersed with small leaflets, all with wooly undersides. Larger leaflets are oblong, have rounded tips, and are sharply toothed. Yellow flowers, reminiscent of buttercups, are carried singly on a leafless stalk.

Where and when to gather

Silverweed is especially common on the upper edges of tidal marshes, but it can also be found near springs, streambanks, and other damp but mostly sunny places. The roots are most palatable in autumn, once the leaves die back, but may also be passable in spring before the foliage develops.

How to gather

Dig around the base of the plant to loosen the soil and pull the silverweed roots to the surface. Multiple roots can be found under most plants. Pick or cut roots from the central stalk selectively, and the plant can be returned alive to the soil. All roots can be harvested if needed.

How to eat

With their sweet potato flavor, silverweed roots have great potential, but are not easy to prepare. Traditionally roots are pit cooked for extended periods to yield delicate textures and flavors, but other cooking methods have been reported. Steaming or roasting for long periods at low temperatures is usually most successful. The roots are tricky: they can be very bitter if not gathered at the right times (when the leaves are dormant) and cooked in the right ways, so allow time for experimentation. When cooked correctly, silverweed roots are sweet. When this happens, reflect deeply on your success and record your recipe for posterity.

Future harvests

Selective root harvesting helps ensure future productivity, as does the traditional practice of tossing any unused root fragments back into the disturbed earth. Rootlets taken to almost any suitable site will propagate, which is good news to restoration ecologists, but disturbing news to conventional gardeners.

Sitka spruce

Picea sitchensis

EDIBLE needle buds, needles, sap

Undeveloped needles are palatable, with a piney-citrusy taste.

Seldom growing far from saltwater, Sitka spruce is among the region's most coast-bound trees. Spruces stand out in this setting, with tall straight trunks that sometimes grow to giant proportions and clad in mosaic scale bark. These trees are so well-adapted to the coastal winds that airplanes like the Spruce Goose were once crafted from their wood. Their shallow, tough roots are a mainstay of traditional Northwest Coast basketry, and their uniquely sharp needles catch summer fog drip, so that even on dry but foggy days the roots are fed by little patches of homemade drizzle.

Sitka spruce trees may be formidable, but they still have food to offer, especially the clusters of undeveloped needles (see "Conifers" pages 162–163). Mature needles are sometimes used in teas. The pitch is widely reputed for its medicinal value, but also can give characteristic spruce flavor to foods and beverages.

When mature, Sitka spruce spines are stiff, hard, and pointy to the touch, and oblong cones with soft scales dangle below.

How to identify

A coniferous tree of the salty coastal zone, reaching 200 feet or higher when mature, with sharply pointed needles that are borne singly, mosaic scale bark, and slender soft cones of roughly 3 to 4 inches in length.

Where and when to gather

Sitka spruce is seldom found more than 15 miles (25 km) from saltwater. Needle buds are best gathered in spring when they are first bursting from their brownish orange bud sheath. Needles for other uses can be gathered year-round, but are often more palatable when they have sprouted in the current year. Spruce pitch is best gathered in spring, when the tree's sap is flowing freely, but dried pitch can be gathered from tree scars year-round. Spruce buds can be plucked one by one from the branches. Needles can be gathered similarly. Spruce pitch gathering can involve scoring the side of the tree, placing a container below the cut to catch flowing sap, and

returning intermittently for a few days. Native American harvesters sometimes dig shallow holes into the sides of trees to serve as pitch wells, scoring the bark so that sap gathers in these wells rather than on the ground. Dried pitch can also be judiciously picked from cuts in the bark. Pitch gathered either way, but especially in this dry form, should be warmed on low heat until it becomes liquid and filtered through cheesecloth or similar material to remove impurities before being allowed to cool and harden again.

As they pop out from their protective sheaths, the fresh little needle buds of Sitka spruce are soft, edible, and even sweet.

Tree saps

Tree saps have a variety of culinary uses. Their use in syrups is well known to most pancake enthusiasts, and the use of certain tree saps as sweeteners is a time-honored tradition in many parts of the world. Sap is also a customary source of gum and can be mixed with beeswax,

cornstarch, or other ingredients to reduce its stickiness. The traditional medicinal values of tree sap, used internally or externally, are widely appreciated around the globe. Intrepid harvesters increasingly use saps as flavorings, lending brilliantly sylvan flavors to soups, confections, and many other foods and inviting culinary applications that are still being explored today.

The use of conifer sap in modern cuisine to impart piney and citrus flavors is still in its experimental phases, but seems to have promise in the flavoring of beverages, soups, and even baked goods. The saps of spruces, firs, and pines can all be used, and each has its own subtly distinct flavors and properties. Most conifer sap recipes involve heating the sap until it is liquid, straining to remove impurities, and cooling again until it becomes firm. After all of this, it still remains sticky. Texture is the main culinary challenge, requiring warm temperatures or additional ingredients to keep sap liquid and to combat stickiness.

The sap of deciduous trees also has many time-honored uses (see pages 44–46) and can often be gathered when it presents itself on the trees' exteriors. After gathering, it is best to heat it slightly until it is a thin liquid and run it through cheesecloth to remove impurities. Flavors vary between species, but also between individual trees and gathering conditions. More traditionally, Native peoples have maintained special relationships with individual trees, drawing sap from cuts in the bark that are kept open or pitch wells dug as little hollows in the tree's wood, where sap gathers in pools.

Sap users traditionally find ways to show their respect and attempt to repay the debt incurred by trees harvested in this manner. Bear in mind that sap collection is a highly invasive food gathering practice that can compromise a tree's health. Harvest these products sparingly and perhaps find your own ways of repaying the favor to the trees.

How to eat

When they are very young, spruce buds can be eaten like a tender, citrusy berry. These can be eaten fresh, but are also popular as a hops replacement in beers, and may have a range of other culinary possibilities. Within a few

days of appearing, the juvenile needles harden a little and can still be eaten but the texture becomes mealier. Mature needles can be added to teas to impart citrus to conifer flavors, a process that works best if the needles are heated slowly but not allowed to boil for more than a few moments. Spruce pitch is sticky, but when mixed with other ingredients it can add flavor to beverages, soups, and other foods; it is more commonly used in gum or salve mixtures. Chewing the pitch like gum often leaves the mouth full of sticky pitch, but mixing the sap with substances like beeswax or cornstarch helps to reduce this effect.

Future harvests

Generally, spruces have enough buds or needles that a little harvesting won’t hurt, but gather sparingly to avoid harming the tree. Harvest pitch sparingly, if at all, due to the potential adverse effects on the tree. Sitka spruce germinates well from seed, and seedlings transplanted in winter often thrive in suitable locations.

Warnings

Mature Sitka spruce needles are sharp, and some Native American names for the tree refer to it as “the tree that really hurts when you grab it.” Bear this in mind as you gather needles to make tea or wander through spruce groves.

skunk cabbage

Lysichiton americanus

EDIBLE shoots, stems, flowers, leaves, roots

Mix skunk cabbage with other foods, allowing the natural bite to become a spicy background.

Skunk cabbage is the ultimate swamp dweller, taking root in the darkest, muckiest bogs of the Northwest. Huge, oval waxy-green leaves extend in a circular pattern around a distinctive yellow club-shaped flower wrapped in a bright yellow sheath. Although skunk cabbage is not widely eaten, its fresh stems, flowers, and leaf stalks can be eaten in spring, and the roots can be eaten year-round. In spite of the plant's significant preparation needs and the skunkiness of its scent, there are those who still celebrate the virtues of skunk cabbage as a food plant.

How to identify

Fleshy, upright perennial with huge oval leaves, up to 3 feet long and 1 foot wide. A bright yellow hood initially encloses the yellow flowers, sometimes greenish in hue, which are clustered on the upper end of a 1-foot-tall stalk that eventually outgrows the hood.

Nothing else in the Northwestern landscape looks like a mature skunk cabbage plant, with giant flat leaves supported by pithy green stalks.

Where and when to gather

Skunk cabbage can be found in freshwater marshes west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, especially in places with partial shade. Freshly sprouted flowers, as well as leaf and stem buds, appear in the very late winter or early spring, sometimes with the flower preceding the greens by days or weeks. Roots are best gathered in autumn or winter.

How to gather

Selectively pick fresh leaf buds, stems, and flowers as they emerge from the plant’s central stalk. Root gathering can be challenging in boggy environments, but sloppy extrication is possible with a shovel, taking the whole root section or portions thereof.

The big, bright yellow flower stalks of skunk cabbage spring upward early in the season, often preceding the emergence of bright green leaves.

How to eat

Be forewarned: skunk cabbage contains tiny, sharp crystals of calcium oxalate, which can cause irritation to the mouth and digestive tract if not prepared properly. Some sources describe the plant as toxic, but this may be alarmist. The younger the shoots the less caustic they will be, but even the youngest sprouts will need to be cut, rinsed, and cooked well before being edible. Those who use skunk cabbage often mix it with other foods,

allowing the natural bite to become a spicy background. Avoid mature leaves, for they have little hope of redemption no matter how long they are cooked. The root also requires cooking to become palatable, but becomes somewhat gingery if prepared correctly, usually involving slow cooking and repeat rinses with water. It can be dried and used as tea or ground into flour for use in baked goods.

Future harvests

Root segments can be transplanted from dense patches to appropriate sites, ideally after the leaves have died back in autumn. Seeds do best if planted immediately after they have been collected from naturally occurring patches.

Warnings

Skunk cabbage contains calcium oxalate crystals, which can cause irritation to the mouth and digestive tract if the plant is not prepared properly. Rinse the plant repeatedly and change cooking water multiple times to reduce the effect. Do not eat skunk cabbage raw, and eat cooked plants only in moderate quantities.

soapberry

Shepherdia canadensis

buffalo berry, Indian ice cream berry, soopolallie

EDIBLE berries

With a potent, somewhat cherry-like flavor, this berry is traditionally whipped into a froth.

Soapberry is surely one of the most entertaining traditional edibles to be found in the Northwest, and tribes formerly traveled or traded over vast distances to acquire this fluffy foodstuff. For generations, Native Americans have pulverized and whipped the berry into a frothy sour sorbet commonly called Indian ice cream. The flavor is potent and somewhat cherry-like, the texture like beaten egg white, and the color a light salmon. The tradition of making Indian ice cream is alive and well and is experiencing a rebound of sorts as tribes include small, sweetened portions of this confection at social and ceremonial events. The plant itself is shrubby and erect, kin to the cultivated Russian olive, and the bright red oval berries feel oddly soapy to the touch.

How to identify

Deciduous spreading shrub, up to 13 feet tall, with smooth but scaly-looking gray-brown bark. Small oval leaves are dark green on top and densely covered with white felt on the undersides. Small yellowish brown flowers cluster on stems before leaves emerge and develop into bright red oval berries.

Bright red berries dot the densely packed soapberry shrub, with its gray stalks and thick leaves.

Where and when to gather

Soapberry’s distribution is regrettably patchy across the Pacific Northwest, being found in rocky or recently burned sites in the interior Northwest, Puget Sound area, and southeastern Vancouver Island and river valley outposts in British Columbia and Alaska. The berries can be gathered from mid-summer to autumn; the first frosts of autumn usually sweeten the berries a little.

How to gather

Traditional harvesting methods involve placing a mat or blanket under the bush and giving it several good whacks with a stick to shake the berries loose. If you try this, be kind—hitting only as hard as needed and not inflicting any lasting damage to the shrub. The berries can also be readily picked one by one. Berries turn translucent and brilliant red when they are ready to harvest.

How to eat

Berries are traditionally mixed with an equal measure of water, as well as some type of sweetener, and then whipped into a froth. In days of yore, sweeteners included some of our sweeter berries, such as salal and huckleberry, or sugar-rich camas. Today, artificial and processed sweeteners often take their place, but experimentation with native whole-food sweeteners will yield good results. The berries alone are too sour for most harvesters. Anything oily touching the berries during harvesting or processing will undermine their potential frothiness. Berries are also conventionally canned, mixed into a sort of cranberry sauce mixture, or dried and used like tart currants. Soapberry's sour taste has been incorporated into unconventional recipes in recent times to mixed, but often quite positive, reviews.

Future harvests

Seeds can be gathered and deposited in suitably sunny sites, though their strong hulls sometimes need to be scarified (gouged or scraped) and otherwise abused to foster germination. Cuttings can be taken sparingly. Plant several in a single site, as these plants are unisexual, so both male and female soapberry bushes must mingle in the same neighborhood for berries to develop. The range of this plant has the potential to expand slightly at its margins, as human-induced environmental change brings newly open, dry, and sunny spaces. Soapberry bushes are great for restoration of degraded lands, being one of a small number of non-leguminous plants native to the Pacific Northwest that capture airborne nitrogen and release it into the soil.

Warnings

Saponins, chemical compounds that aid in the foaming of soapberry, are irritating or even toxic in large concentrations, so soapberry should be eaten in modest quantities on any given day.

spiny wood fern

Dryopteris expansa

spreading wood fern, shield fern

EDIBLE roots

When cooked, the roots—a traditional Native American delicacy—become sweet and can be eaten like a potato or mixed with other foods.

Although the roots of most Northwestern ferns are at least somewhat edible, the spiny wood fern stands alone. Growing in the dampest forests, this delicate small to medium-sized fern holds delicious secrets just below the surface of the woody rot and funk. The roots and fronds converge in a multi-stemmed root ball, with a shape that has been compared to a pineapple or a compact cluster of small bananas. When cooked, the roots become sweet and are among the more important fern foods of Native peoples along the Northwest coast.

How to identify

Broadly triangular in outline, clustered fronds form an upright clump of finely divided dark green fronds, 1 to 2 feet tall.

Unlike many of its fern relatives, spiny wood fern grows directly atop rotting logs, stumps, and the mossy, rotting bases of trees.

Where and when to gather

Spiny wood ferns typically grow in cool, damp forests west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, either on top of rotting wood or in soils that contain large quantities of humus. Gathering times vary, but autumn is traditional, as the plant puts on new edible fingers on the rootstalk for the following year’s growth.

How to gather

Carefully dig up the rootstalk. Roots that are flat and dark are not especially tasty, but the living roots—thicker and whitish—are edible. These roots can be broken off or the entire rootstalk dug up and cooked as a unit.

Growing in tidy and symmetrical shapes, spiny wood ferns have a delicate appearance but are tough. Only the peeled roots are tasty and tender.

How to eat

The rough, darker exterior of the roots are generally peeled before or after cooking, revealing the soft, light-colored parts inside. Long-term cooking at slow temperatures seems to yield the best results. The roots can be eaten like a potato or mixed with other foods. Native cuisine has various recipes, but experimentation with modern ingredients and methods may reveal new possibilities.

Future harvests

Spiny wood fern can grow slowly, so harvest selectively, taking only a few fingers from the root ball or only a few plants from an area containing several. These ferns can be propagated from spores in new settings with plenty of rotting wood. Rhizomes carefully cut from larger plants can sometimes also be used to grow new ferns.

springbank clover

Trifolium wormskioldii

EDIBLE roots, leaves, flowers

Roots taste like Chinese bean sprouts when cooked.

Many clovers can be eaten. Among those available to Northwestern harvesters, the native springbank clover is probably the best, with the white roots tasting like Chinese bean sprouts when cooked. Creeping along the ground in dense mats, springbank clover can be found on moist sites throughout the Northwest. Its triads of leaves are characteristic of clovers, but the leaves are oblong and the plant is decorated in brilliant tufts of pink clover flowers.

Native peoples along the Northwest coast have traditionally constructed entire clover gardens of these plants to satisfy their appetite for the nutritious roots. Popular long ago in trade and ritual gatherings, springbank clover roots were barged between villages in dugout canoes and mounded in piles as tall as houses to provision vast ceremonial feasts.

In some settings, springbank clover’s leaves look more conventionally clover-like, but the bright pink blossom and habitat still reveal its identity.

How to identify

Perennial sprawling or semi-upright herb with compound leaves made up of three oval leaflets, pointed at the tip and finely toothed. Flowers are clustered into tight, round balls of purple or red, sometimes white-tipped.

Where and when to gather

Springbank clover is especially abundant near springs, streams, tidal flats, and other places that are damp but well drained and sunny. The roots may be gathered at most times of year; roots, leaves, and flowers are most abundant and flavorful from spring through early autumn and should be harvested when they are still new, fresh, and soft.

How to gather

For best results, dig soil around the perimeter of a clump of clover, pull the plant gently from the excavated material, shaking soil from the roots back into the hole as you go. In some cases, springbank clover grows in soil that is so porous and loose that it may be gently shaken from the ground without the use of tools. The best tasting roots appear especially fresh, white, and pliable. Greens and flowers also can be plucked by hand or cut with scissors or similar tools.

Creeping through the marshy quarters of the Northwest, springbank clover often sports triads of leaves that are unusually long and pointed by clover standards.

Bundles of off-white springbank clover roots, prepared for pit cooking.

How to eat

Roots may be eaten fresh or cooked, with steaming being the most traditional method. The roots can be mixed with salads or eaten alone with butter or oil and seasonings. Young, pliable foliage can be gathered in spring and is good in salads, and the flower heads are popular in herbal teas.

Future harvests

Placing unused rootlets back into the ground when digging, a longstanding Native American tradition, goes a long way toward reestablishing populations being harvested. Rootlets can be transported from place to place; when set in moist but well-drained soil, these often develop new colonies. Seeding is also possible, using spent flowers with seed capsules plucked from the plant. A nitrogen-fixing colonizer of disturbed ground,

springbank clover is an excellent addition to recently disturbed ground—as good for environmental restoration as it is for food.

sticky gooseberry

Ribes lobbii

gummy gooseberry, red-flowered gooseberry, fuchsia-flowered gooseberry

EDIBLE berries

Because of their somewhat unusual and pungent flavor, these berries are often mixed into other foods to add some piquancy or color.

Sticky gooseberry may be as familiar to Northwestern gardeners as it is to Northwestern harvesters. Hugely popular as an ornamental landscape plant, sticky gooseberry is best known for its flowers. They bear a wonderful resemblance to fuchsia, dangling for all to see with their red outer sepals, white inner petals, and long springy anthers. Stalks are woody but flexible, and leaves are bright green, with three to five round lobes. The berries of this plant are purplish red, sometimes trending toward brown, with lots of rough bristles and sticky to the touch, as the name implies. Their flavor is a bit funky, but cooking helps. The berries are often mixed into other foods to add some piquancy or color, and they have long been a valuable food for Native American communities. Every once in a while, a bush with very sweet fruit can be found, so do keep trying.

With dangling flowers looking like bristling fuchsia blossoms, the sticky gooseberry compares well with any domesticated flowering shrub.

Translucent and purplish red, with little brown beaks, the sticky gooseberry is a bit gummy and bristly by some harvesters' standards, but definitely worth a taste.

How to identify

Small erect to spreading shrub with stems bearing three spines at each node. Small 1-inch-wide leaves are nearly round and shallowly lobed, with a shiny upper surface and hairy underside that is sticky. Clusters of one to three star-shaped red flowers develop into oblong purplish red berries covered with bristles.

Where and when to gather

Thriving in the dappled and partial shade of forest edges and floors, sticky gooseberry lives here and there on well-drained soils in the lower elevations of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges and their drier foothill forests to its west. It can also be found on damper ground east of the Cascades. Berries appear from late spring through summer, depending upon elevation and latitude.

How to gather

Berries can be picked one by one or in handfuls. Ripe berries are often plump and very slightly softer than unripe berries of similar size.

How to eat

Responses to this berry are mixed, and some find the fresh berries almost unpalatable due to their bristles, gumminess, and unusual flavors. The flavors vary, so experimentation is warranted. Some harvesters mix this berry, when it is available in abundance, with other more flavorful berries in cooked combinations for jams, pies, and the like, giving the mixture some interesting depth and complexity.

Future harvests

Berries and cuttings commonly propagate successfully, and volunteer seedlings transport well if moved between like sites when dormant.

Warnings

When eaten in large quantities, some wild currants have a mild laxative quality.

stinging nettle

Urtica dioica

Northwest nettle, Indian spinach

EDIBLE leaves, stems

Nettles are nutrient-rich and make an excellent cooked potherb, with a taste that compares well to cooked domesticated greens like spinach.

Nearly invisible, stiff, and hollow hairs armed with irritating oils perch on the stems and serrated leaves of stinging nettle. Along streambanks and other shady margins, stinging nettles form thickets, both menacing and inviting, with plants standing waist-high and sometimes grasping sunward higher than one's head. With vivid childhood memories of hours spent nursing the spiky electric ache that follows a nettle encounter, I needed a few years and some gestalt-shifting reevaluation to view nettles as something I wanted to put in my mouth. Yet with cooking or drying the stinging hairs are neutralized, leaving behind only nettle's rich flavors and nutrition for us to enjoy. It's not just for painful lesions anymore.

Though they may be best known for their painful sting, nettles are an especially good wild green. They are nutrient-rich and make an excellent cooked potherb, with a taste that varies but compares well with cooked domesticated greens like spinach, mildly tangy but seldom terribly bitter. Increasingly, nettle is wending its way into Northwestern cuisine, from soups to teas to sautéed dishes.

Raising jaggedly serrated leaves skyward in opposite pairs from a stem bristling in short, fine hairs, stinging nettle has an angular look that presages its prickly disposition.

Stinging nettle is best gathered when it is young, tender, and growing close to the ground.

How to identify

Tall perennial with broad oval leaves, coarsely toothed, and armed with stinging hairs. Numerous tiny flowers, ranging from green to brownish purple, droop in long clusters.

Where and when to gather

Nettle grows best on the shaded edges of streams, forests, and roads. Leaves are best gathered early in the season, in spring and early summer. Late-season stems and leaves are tougher, less flavorful, and cause mild stomach discomfort in some harvesters. Other species of *Urtica* nettles that can be found just outside of the Pacific Northwest may warrant harvesters' attention as well.

How to gather

Focus especially on fresh growth: the newly developed shoots popping from the ground or uppermost leaves on larger nettle stalks. Use gloves and possibly scissors to make clean breaks in the stem and reduce the chances of irritating the skin. Several plants in the region serve as a good impromptu poultice for nettle stings; thimbleberry is probably the best, but bracken fern and other soft leaves can suffice in an itchy pinch.

How to eat

Fresh nettle should not be eaten, but cooking or drying disarms its sting. Use nettle leaves like any cooked green: sautéed, steamed, or mixed into soups, pesto, or sauces. Dried nettle is a popular and generally healthful ingredient in herbal teas; it is rich in vitamins A, C, and K as well as iron and other minerals. Stinging nettle is also working its way into beer and other beverages as a mild flavoring as well. The roots and seeds are sometimes used in herbal tonics. Experiment broadly.

Future harvests

When planted in disturbed and open but shaded sites, nettle tends to spread quickly. Return to patches in late summer and autumn to gather the dangling strands of small, flat seed capsules found on the tips of each stalk, or cut out and transplant the small runners that extend from mature plants. Propagate this irritating plant in places not frequented by innocent bystanders.

stink currant

Ribes bracteosum

skunk currant, blue currant, grayberry

EDIBLE berries

Often sweet, the berries are eaten fresh and also make good jams, jellies, syrups, and other sweets.

In the drippy damp of coastal forests and along streambanks, stink currants form lanky bushes from waist-high to well over your head. Dangling from the flexible green stems are long strings of dusty blue, roughly spherical to ovoid berries with dark blue terminal tips. The leaves, roughly the size of a human hand, have a distinctively skunky to cat-box odor when crushed, hence the plant's name, but don't let that discourage you from eating the berries. The flowers are borne in rows extending from a single stalk in a configuration that anticipates summertime's dangling berries.

How to identify

Loosely erect, branching shrub with thornless stems. Maple-like leaves, with five to seven lobes, are deeply veined, sharply toothed, and shiny on top, with yellow glands and small hairs on the dull underside. Clusters of small, roughly cup-shaped white flowers are carried on an upright spike, 6 to 12 inches long, and give way to dangling clusters of speckled, dusty blue berries.

Stink currant berries and leaves vary from place to place, but the dusty blue-gray berry and thick veins in waxy deep green leaves are defining traits.

Plump and juicy blue-gray speckled stink currant berries dangle on long, thin stalks.

Where and when to gather

A denizen of moist, cool places, stink currant is widespread in forests west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, often situated in dappled sunlight or on partially sunny forest margins. Berries appear from late spring through summer, depending upon elevation, latitude, and sunlight.

How to gather

Berries can be picked one by one or in handfuls. Ripe berries are often plump and very slightly softer than unripe berries of similar size. The flavor varies considerably from bush to bush, so experimentation would be wise.

How to eat

Often sweet, stink currant berries are sometimes eaten fresh but are especially popular when cooked to make jams, jellies, syrups, pies, and other sweets.

Future harvests

Do not harvest all berries in an area, but leave a few behind to reseed the ground below or for birds to distribute more broadly. Deposit extra berries in places with growing conditions similar to those of the maternal patch. Seeds can be spat strategically from berries eaten fresh, and uncooked berries from food processing may be planted at suitable sites as well. Transplantation of volunteer seedlings is generally possible, especially when the plant is dormant.

Warnings

When eaten in large quantities, some wild currants have a mild laxative quality.

stonecrop

Sedum species

EDIBLE leaves

The juicy, succulent leaves are faintly reminiscent of cucumbers.

Wherever you may be in the Pacific Northwest, stonecrop can be found clinging to a rock near you. With fleshy, succulent leaves, the plant retains water long after rains have ceased, allowing it to live on exposures of rock where few other plants can be found. Here, stonecrop is a cornerstone of entire rocky habitats, a durable flowering plant that is as popular with birds and insects as it is with home gardeners. The entire plant is edible, but the fleshy leaves are easily picked and eaten as a supplementary snack.

How to identify

Creeping succulent perennial, up to 10 inches long, with rounded, ball-shaped fleshy leaves ranging from green to bright red. Yellow flowers composed of five lance-shaped petals form star-shaped clusters atop 4-inch stems.

Clinging inconspicuously to rocky sites, stonecrop’s fleshy succulent leaves range in color from red to green.

Stonecrop’s personality is transformed when yellow flowers rise in bright fiery profusion above the soft leafy lobes below.

Where and when to gather

Stonecrop is especially common on rocky outcrops, aggregating on rock faces, talus slopes, and other rocky or dry soil, usually in full sun. The fleshy leaves can be gathered year-round, but are most tasty and nutritious in spring and summer.

How to gather

Pluck the leaves from stems or directly from the base stalk. Gather selectively, leaving some foliage on individual plants so that they survive.

How to eat

The juicy succulent leaves have a faintly cucumber-like quality, but lack a strong taste all their own. Some harvesters eat these raw as an impromptu trail food, but there is growing experimentation with stonecrop, both raw and cooked, in salads and other mixed foods.

Future harvests

Because stonecrop patches are generally small and grow slowly, harvesters are advised to use this plant sparingly. The plant propagates readily from leaf cuttings. Cut stem sections with a few leaves attached, stick into moistened soil in a suitable site, and new plants will sprout from the nodes where leaves and stem meet.

sword fern

Polystichum munitum

EDIBLE roots

Although not especially tasty, sword fern is widespread and the roasted roots provide an earthy starch with occasional licorice notes.

The dark green foliage of this large fern is well known to most Northwesterners. Sword fern is found throughout the region, especially in the forest understory, where it can form an almost unbroken understory. In a pinch, the roots are edible. A flat pile of fronds can also make a good impromptu mat in the forest for those who harvest and process foods, a time-honored Native American use. Sword ferns are mentioned here not because they are great eating, but because there are an awful lot of them, and their potential uses should not be overlooked.

How to identify

Leathery, evergreen fronds are carried on stiff, upright stalks that emerge from a massive clump. The thick fronds are tapered at the ends and stiffly uniform, giving the fern a refined appearance.

Where and when to gather

Sword fern is common throughout the forests of the region, but it is especially widespread in low-elevation damp forests. The roots are best gathered in spring, before the development of the year’s new leaves, or in autumn once the plant goes dormant.

Especially in rain-leached mineral-poor forest soils, sword ferns measuring many feet across may become the dominant plants of the forest floor.

Its long, single fronds tapering to a point, sword fern enters the world pliable and bright green, with fronds hardening and becoming darker as the plant ages.

How to gather

Roots can be gathered by pulling up the plant, selectively harvesting roots, and replanting the rest or by digging into the soil around the fern to expose root segments.

How to eat

Cleaned roots can be steamed or roasted. Once cooked, their tough exterior is easily peeled. These roots are not as widely palatable as some other fern roots, so culinary experimentation may be in order. Traditionally some Native American communities ate the roots, but only in lean times.

Future harvests

Sword ferns respond well to transplanting, provided that roots are taken largely intact and they are planted in suitable sites. In addition to their aesthetic value, sword ferns tend to be pest- and drought-resistant, making them popular additions to native plant gardens.

tarweed

Madia sativa

EDIBLE seeds

Sweet, somewhat nutty seeds can be roasted and used in cereals or baked goods or ground into flour. Nutritious seed oil can be used in place of olive oil.

With its little yellow flowers and long lance-shaped hairy leaves, this meadow herb does not look like a plant of international importance. Yet its seeds are edible, downright tasty, and have been commercially pressed for their sweet and nutritious oil in several countries. Tarweed was so valued as a dietary staple by Willamette Valley tribes that they owned individual patches of the plant, and some portion of the remnant prairie landscape in the region can be attributed to fires that were set in autumn to loosen tarweed seeds from their pods and eliminate vegetation that might overcrowd this little plant. Despite its many virtues, tarweed's name should be taken as a warning: the plant produces a smelly and sticky translucent tar-like substance that can remain on your shoes long after the harvest is over. Tread gently as you get to know this little yellow-flowered plant.

How to identify

Stout, smelly, sticky perennial, up to 30 inches tall, with branching clusters of hairy stems. Narrow, oblong leaves are covered with hairs. Short-stalked bright yellow flowers, sometimes with red or green tints, are carried in dense clusters and develop into flattened seed heads.

Where and when to gather

Tarweed grows well in sunny sites in the interior valleys west of the Cascade Range, as well as in certain damp but well-drained sites east of the mountains, especially in landscapes that have a long history of widespread

Native American burning. Tarweed seeds are usually gathered in summer and autumn.

How to gather

Seeds can be gathered by stripping seed heads by hand, but picking will be more efficient if you beat seeds into buckets or baskets or onto a tarp or other covered placed on the ground. The use of seed beaters is a time-honored tradition in some Native American communities.

How to eat

The seeds can be roasted and then used in cereals and baked goods or ground into flour. More than a third of the weight of the seeds consists of the sweet, somewhat nutty oil, which remains liquid to very low temperatures and can be used in place of olive oil.

Tarweed’s bright yellow flowers, with deeply serrated petals, make this plant visible among its grassy and herbaceous neighbors.

Future harvests

Although tarweed thrives in certain disturbed sites, most tarweed meadows did not survive as Native American husbandry was replaced by various new disturbances. Conservation of remaining meadows remains a priority, as does the very cautious reintroduction of burning on appropriate and safe sites. Planting of some portion of the seed harvest in suitable sites may yield good results, usually in sunny places with deep and well-drained soils. Tarweed is an appropriate plant for the restoration of recently disturbed sites in some of the region’s most disturbance-prone areas, such as the Willamette Valley, Puget Sound lowlands, and lower mainland in British Columbia.

thimbleberry

Rubus parviflorus

EDIBLE berries, shoots, leaves

Tasting a bit like raspberries with tiny crunchy seeds, thimbleberries are outstanding fresh, but can be cooked, preserved, or dried.

Thimbleberry is a delightful plant to encounter in the wild, with its showy flowers, soft leaves, and tasty red berries. There is nothing of the harsh prickliness that characterizes some of its *Rubus* relatives. Tasting a bit like raspberries with tiny crunchy seeds, the bright red berry is made up of tight whorls of drupes arranged like a shallow thimble, perched in groups of two to five on short stalks. They provide a vitamin C–rich crunch and, though some berries are dry and a bit mealy, most are juicy and at least a little sweet. The plant is notable for its large, fuzzy maple-like leaves and its white flowers, which hint at this plant's distant kinship with roses. Thimbleberry's edible bright green shoots are juicy, sweet, and nutrient-rich. Its leaves can be dried to make a tea that has hints of berry flavor; they are also reputed to have medicinal value and make a fine poultice for nettle stings and other things that might irritate you. Native peoples once owned, pruned, and otherwise managed productive patches of these fine plants, suggesting their traditional importance and appeal.

Thimbleberry’s flower is white and rose-like.

Bright red thimbleberries rise up in small clusters from the plant like delicate, fine-grained raspberries.

How to identify

Deciduous shrub with upright stems, 3 to 8 feet tall. Bark changes from green on young shoots to reddish brown and flaky with age. Maple-like leaves are large and five-lobed, with fuzz on both sides. Blousy five-petaled white flowers, 1 to 2 inches across, develop into open clusters of cap-shaped red berries.

Where and when to gather

Thimbleberry grows especially well in damp areas with a little sun, such as along streambanks, roadsides, and the edges of forests, thickets, and fields. It is more common at lower elevations. The bright green shoots appear in spring and early summer; leaves appear soon thereafter and are generally best when young. Berries appear in early summer and can be harvested as they redden throughout the season.

How to gather

Berries can be gathered one by one as they become red. Native harvesters sometimes gather the berries while still a bit underripe and then wrap them in thimbleberry leaves or cedar bark to ripen. Pliable shoots can be snapped off as they grow from the larger plant.

Thimbleberry bushes offer many food opportunities, from their pliable shoots to their soft fuzzy leaves and delicious berries.

How to eat

The berries are outstanding fresh, but also work well in baked goods, pies, pastries, jams, jellies, and other foods. They are also popular when dried, the seeds giving a satisfying crunch to individually dried berries or traditional berry cakes. The leaves, with berry-flavored overtones, can be dried to make tea.

Future harvests

Thimbleberry is readily propagated from berries placed in suitably moist soil.

thistle

Cirsium brevistylum, *C. edule*, and others

Indian thistle, edible thistle

EDIBLE stems, leaves, roots

Roots become soft and sweet as they are slowly cooked; they can also be ground into flour for baking.

Prickly and spiny thistles are well known, but they hardly look like the sort of thing you would want to put into your mouth. Yet when pruned of their prickly bits they are sweet and succulent. Because they were so well protected by their spiny armor through the millennia, thistles may not have been compelled to employ bitter compounds or other taste-busting tricks to discourage marauding herbivores. We humans, with our gloves and our delicate opposable-thumb grip, are the unlikely beneficiaries.

Thistles’ spiny stalks are crowned with soft flowers of brilliant pink.

Many different thistle species are edible, including both native thistles and non-native weedy ones. Native peoples of the region traditionally ate the stems of thistles in impressive quantities, as did peoples around the globe. The roots can also be cooked, becoming soft and sweet, or ground into flour for baking. Leaves are palatable when they are very young and not yet prickly. Locally abundant and often invasive, non-native thistles can be eaten to keep these weeds in check. As part of the walked-past weedy flora of the Northwest, thistles deserve a second glance.

How to identify

Erect perennials, mostly with cobweb-hairy stems, especially just under the flower head. Lance-shaped leaves are mostly irregularly lobed and spiny. White or pink to reddish purple fuzzy flower heads are round, mostly clustered at stem ends, with spiny leaves at the base of each head.

Though spiky and disagreeable from top to bottom, the soft inner stem of thistle is a popular wild edible. This is *Cirsium edule*.

Where and when to gather

Thistles grow throughout the region in wet locations with adequate sun. Native thistles are often concentrated in damp meadows or springs, and non-native thistles congregate in disturbed sites. Thistle stalks and leaves are best gathered in spring as they first develop; they are pliable then and not yet armed with firm spines. Later in the year they become relatively hard and bitter. Roots are typically gathered in autumn from plants that have not bolted.

How to gather

Carefully pick stems, ideally with gloves to protect your hands from spines. Stems should be peeled to remove any prickles or external fuzz. Leaves are edible if you clip off the spines, but this is labor-intensive and most harvesters just strip out and consume the leaf’s midrib if they consume the leaf at all. Large roots can be taken from the base of the plant.

How to eat

Stems and disarmed leaf segments are tasty fresh and also popular cooked —like a sweet green in flavor, but in stalk form. When cooked, the inedible inulin in roots transforms into brown and digestible sugars; long, slow cooking sometimes does this best. Flour made from the dried and ground root has potential in baking.

Future harvests

As many thistles are introduced, fairly invasive weeds, wild propagation should be done with some caution. Seek to emphasize the propagation and protection of the native edible thistle, *Cirsium brevistylum*. If you wish to honor and nurture thistles, please do your homework beforehand.

Warnings

Not only are thistles prickly, but they also cause contact dermatitis in some people. There is evidence suggesting that some thistles may be carcinogenic when eaten in large quantities.

trailing wild blackberry

Rubus ursinus

Pacific blackberry

EDIBLE berries, shoots

The berries' firmness and slightly lower moisture content make them a good alternative to Himalayan blackberries.

Often mentioned only parenthetically in plant guides, trailing wild blackberry—the region's only truly native blackberry—deserves more respect. Each summer, the blue-gray to red stem creeps through the thicket tangle, lined with tidy triads of toothed, dark green leaves and little rose-like flowers. Soon thereafter, striking red berries develop, long and thin like a loganberry, then quickly turn a shiny bluish black, indicating their ripeness. Trailing wild blackberries are sweet, with a brighter, fruitier flavor and firmer texture than the more widely known Himalayan blackberry. Most Native American harvesters and many non-Native old-timers swear by the virtues of the native blackberry, spurning other introduced blackberry species as flashy but inferior pretenders.

Creeping along the ground and through thickets, the native trailing wild blackberry produces small elongated berries that are tasty and sweet.

How to identify

Deciduous vine with weak, trailing stems, 6 to 30 feet long, armed with curved thorns. Dark green, toothed leaves appear in threes, or occasionally singly or in fives, along the draping stem. White or pink flowers develop into firm, oblong black berries with many seeds.

Where and when to gather

Trailing wild blackberry grows passably well in the understory of established forests, especially if plants have at least patchy summer sunlight, but this species seems to thrive especially in logged and otherwise disturbed forest lands or on the forest's shrubby edges, where sunlight abounds. Young shoots should be gathered in spring. Berries can be gathered throughout the summer.

How to gather

Berries can be gathered one by one as they become deep bluish black. The shoots can be plucked from the tips of vines as they grow in spring.

How to eat

The berries are outstanding fresh, but also work well in muffins, pies, pastries, jams, jellies, sauces, and any other recipes in which berries make sense to you. Their firmness and slightly lower moisture content make them a good alternative to Himalayan blackberries when the non-native berry is too mushy. Like all berry shoots, the small shoots of trailing wild blackberry can be eaten fresh or steamed.

Future harvests

Trailing wild blackberry plants can be diffuse, reflecting the historical distribution of bird droppings. Large, concentrated patches suitable for sustained harvests are often difficult to find in natural settings, so perhaps propagate several berries together in suitable sites to foster future picking opportunities. Wild trailing blackberry propagates well when berries are worked into the soil matrix in sunny sites. The plant will persist, but often linger small and berryless, when in deep shade. Be forewarned that the plant can become a bit weedy and invasive in disturbed ground.

trapper’s tea and Labrador tea

Ledum glandulosum (trapper’s tea)

Ledum groenlandicum (Labrador tea)

EDIBLE leaves

The leaves emit a spicy fragrance. When boiled in water, they have a flavor reminiscent of Chinese black tea.

You can find the region’s best natural tea growing in some of the poorest soils of the Pacific Northwest. Looking like unremarkable evergreen shrubs, trapper’s tea and Labrador tea (the common names “trapper’s tea” and “Indian tea” are sometimes applied to both species) thrive in peaty, highly acidic soils on marshes or boggy forests. Trapper’s tea sports tiny white hairs on leaf undersides; Labrador tea has hairs of rusty red.

How to identify

An evergreen shrub, up to 4 feet tall, with oblong, leathery, 2-inch-long leaves that are dark green on top and rusty or whitish wooly underneath. Leaf edges roll, and leaves hang down with age. Cream to white flowers with five spreading petals are borne in umbrella-shaped clusters at branch ends.

Often growing in marshes as low matted shrubs, both species raise clusters of white flowers from reddish stems.

Curling slightly downward at the edges, trapper’s tea and Labrador tea leaves are green on top and wooly underneath.

Where and when to gather

Both species are especially abundant in boggy, peaty places; portions of the Northwest with formerly glacial terrain seem to have more than their fair share. Leaves can be gathered through much of the year, but have different qualities depending on their age. Experimentation is warranted.

How to gather

Pick the current year’s leaves selectively from live plants.

How to eat

Leaves may be used fresh or dried and stored for later use. Recipes vary, but many tea-makers prefer to boil the leaves in water for a time rather than simply steeping. The tea may be doctored with sweeteners, dairy products, or anything else you ordinarily choose to put in your tea.

Future harvests

The small seed capsules can be gathered and worked into suitably wet and peaty soil. Trapper’s and Labrador tea also produce suckers that extend out and begin establishing roots; these can be cut from the plant in winter and transplanted to new locations.

Warnings

Drink trapper’s tea in moderation. Although accounts of health complaints associated with this tea are quite rare, the plants do contain alkaloids that, in theory, can cause gastric trouble and other ill effects when consumed in very large quantities.

tule

Schoenoplectus acutus

EDIBLE stem shoots, roots, seeds, pollen

The stem shoots make a good tender vegetable, raw or cooked, and the seeds, pollen, and roots are used as gruel or flour for baked goods.

Cylindrical green spires of this native bulrush tower above the marsh surface, standing improbably tall above the adjacent marsh vegetation, with little tufts of flowers or seed capsules on their terminal tips. In freshwater and brackish wetlands throughout the region, tule stands alone, sometimes attaining heights of up to 10 feet. For many Native Americans, tule is a source of materials for traditional baskets and crafts, such as impressively crafted duck decoys, floor mats, hats, and tents. Canoes made of bundled tule allowed harvesters of old to pass smoothly over the water’s surface. Though little known as a food plant, the stem shoots, seeds, pollen, and roots of this plant are edible, all representing welcome and fresh-flavored additions to the foraging options of the Northwest.

Growing from 3 to 10 feet tall and topped with small brown bristly flowers, the green stalks of tule protrude from the shallow waters of marshes and lake margins.

How to identify

Stout perennial with thick, rounded green stems, 3 to 10 feet tall. Long stems tuft up from root mats and are topped with clustered, pale brownish flowers.

Where and when to gather

Tule grows in shallow marshes and along lake edges and slackwater stream margins throughout the region, from estuarine marshes on the rainy ocean coast to the lake margins of Oregon’s high deserts. Fresh stem shoots are gathered in spring, early in the growing season, and pollen can be gathered soon thereafter. Seeds can be gathered in summer and autumn. Roots are best gathered in autumn.

How to gather

Pick fresh stems as they emerge from the plant’s base. The fleshy roots are usually gathered by unearthing entire plants, but roots can be dug from the margins in order to preserve the plant; gathering is easiest in places where the marsh has dried out at the end of the growing season. Seed gathering can be laborious, but it can be accomplished by running fingers through ripe seed stalks and catching what easily breaks away. Pollen gathering is best accomplished by placing a bag over male flowers and shaking. Gaining access to shallow-water plants can be difficult; consider fashioning and navigating a tule stalk canoe.

How to eat

Fresh stem shoots can be peeled and eaten raw or cooked. Roots are generally peeled and cooked, the tough fibers removed, and sometimes made into a gruel or flour. Seeds have a hull that must be removed; they are often roasted or boiled and used in cereals or baked goods, or can be ground into flour. Pollen can be used as a sort of flour and has traditionally been formed into cakes.

Future harvests

Tule rhizomes dug from the marsh do very well at propagating in disturbed wetland sites and are popular in environmental restoration projects. Toss a few seeds in suitable slow-water habitat soon after gathering, and odds are good that a few will germinate.

violet

Viola species

EDIBLE flowers, leaves, stems

The fruity flavor of violet leaves and flowers is sometimes accented with notes of wintergreen.

Violets grow widely in the Pacific Northwest and are edible wherever you find them. Their showy small flowers appear in spring and continue to dapple the region’s meadows and forest floors with yellow and purple well into summer. Although the plant’s diminutive size ensures that gathering will be slow and output small, the fruity, wintergreen-inflected flavor of leaves and flowers and their beauty give them a unique place in the foraging repertoire.

How to identify

A small, leafy perennial with heart-shaped to semi-circular leaves. Yellow or purple, five-petaled flowers are carried on stalks above leaves.

Bright yellow violets and their purple kin dot the forest floor each year, rising up amid heart-shaped and half-circle leaves.

Where and when to gather

Violets are found widely throughout the region, though they are especially abundant on the floors of moist low-elevation forests. Flowers and fresh leaves should be gathered early in the growing season: early spring in the lowlands and into summer in mountain settings.

How to gather

Selectively pick whole flowers from patches of violets soon after they bloom, and pick fresh new leaves soon after they develop, leaving the rest of the plant intact. Older leaves may be palatable, but the bright green new leaves are especially tender and tasty.

How to eat

Violet flowers are a tasty and decorative addition to many foods, from salads to baked goods to confections. They are also used as decoration and as flavoring in teas and seasonings. Violet leaves are a fine addition to leafy green mixes. The use of violets in medicines and poultices is also widespread.

Future harvests

There is a genuine risk of overharvesting patches of violets, and some of our violet species are relatively rare. For this reason, conscientious harvesters gather selectively, taking only a portion of the fresh flowers and leaves, but leaving most of a patch intact. Focus harvesting on large, well-established patches. Seed pods containing tiny seeds can be gathered after flowering is complete, and seeds sprout well in suitable sites.

wapato

Sagittaria latifolia

EDIBLE tubers

Tubers have a nutty taste and firm texture, reminiscent of water chestnuts.

Rooted in mud below the water’s surface, its showy white flowers and arrowhead-shaped leaves reaching aloft, wapato, a close relative of the Asian water chestnut, is among the most striking plants of the Northwest. Its edible tubers provided a prominent staple to a number of Native American communities, including the Chinookan peoples of the lower Columbia River, who gave the plant its name. Wapato grows most abundantly in freshwater intertidal wetlands, such as on the upper tidal reaches of the Fraser and Columbia Rivers, where wapato once fed entire tribal civilizations. Prior to modern diking and reclamation, places such as Sauvie Island on the lower Columbia River were once occupied by vast, almost monocultural expanses of wapato; this area was sometimes called “wapato valley” by early Euro-American settlers who witnessed this spectacle.

Wapato, with white flowers and arrowhead-shaped leaves, grows out of the submerged ground.

The distinctive arrowhead leaf of wapato, brilliantly green and heavily veined, pointing upward in customary fashion.

Among the few plants that are well suited to regularly fluctuating floodwaters, wapato sometimes can form large uniform patches in protected settings.

How to identify

Marsh perennial growing from a fleshy oblong tuber, white to light blue, which is attached to a network of rhizomes. Leaves all arise from the base of the plant; arrowhead-shaped above water and lance-shaped below water. White flowers are borne in threes on a tall flowering stem.

Where and when to gather

Wapato is found in low-elevation wetlands throughout the Northwest, in lakes, ponds, ditches, slow-moving rivers, and low-salinity tidal areas. Like many root foods, the optimum time for gathering is in autumn, as the plant returns carbohydrates to the tuber but the identifying foliage is still visible; springtime gathering is also appropriate.

How to gather

Native American traditions involve plying very shallow water by canoe and pulling tubers from the mud by hand. In deeper water, people loosen the tubers from the mud with their feet, causing the tubers to float to the surface, and pitch the dislodged harvest into a canoe. Digging sticks or shovels may be used instead, but it is hard to beat the use of feet. Strip away any foliage, rhizomes, rootlets, and smaller tubers as you go. Gathered wapato is often washed on site to remove mud and rootlets. One way or another, harvesters will get a little wet.

How to eat

With a nutty taste and firm texture like the water chestnut, wapato tubers can be eaten raw or cooked, alone or in a variety of recipes. Baking or pit roasting is traditional, and peeling the tuber prior to consumption is a must.

Future harvests

Returning rhizome pieces and undersized tubers to the mud will help ensure the continued productivity of wild patches. These can also be taken and distributed in muddy substrate to establish new colonies. Seed recovery and dispersal can also be attempted.

watercress

Nasturtium officinale

EDIBLE leaves, stems

A healthful fresh green with a tangy bite and a welcome peppery twist.

This aquatic relative of the cresses and mustards is reportedly among the oldest edible greens cultivated by humans. Widely grown and eaten throughout the world, watercress has escaped cultivation and become a semi-invasive aquatic plant in the Northwest. Watercress especially appreciates our mild weather, which allows it to thrive over a much longer annual span than in many other parts of its range. The plant is very rich in vitamins and minerals and has several reported beneficial effects; there is even some scientific confirmation of its cancer-fighting properties.

How to identify

Aquatic perennial with erect or spreading fleshy or hollow stems, 1 to 4 feet long, that form large tangled masses. Compound leaves are composed of three to nine rounded, oval, smooth-edged leaflets. Protruding clusters of small, four-petaled white and green flowers develop into long, thin seed pods.

Where and when to gather

Watercress is found in slow-moving but clear water in many places throughout the region. Gathering is best in spring, before the flowers have fully developed and the leaves grow bitter.

How to gather

Pick leaves or entire plants from their stem bases. Watercress should be eaten soon after harvest, while the leaves are still firm and pliable. Leaves

gradually become desiccated after they are cut and removed from the water, and are not especially appetizing after they have dried. The leaves can be kept cool and moist by placing the cut stems in water to extend their shelf-life. Wash vigorously to rid the plant of the various bugs, big and small, that tend to cling to it in its aquatic environment.

How to eat

A tasty fresh green with a welcome peppery bite, watercress is also a fine cooked green and is increasingly popular as an ingredient in pesto, soups, stir fries, sandwiches, and sauces. For those who don’t mind the bitterness, flowers or later-season greens can be mixed with other greens and other foods to lend them some added tanginess.

Watercress sprawls across the water’s surface with gently lobed leaves, dotted with small, white, four-petaled flowers.

Future harvests

As a semi-invasive aquatic weed, it is perhaps best not to propagate watercress. That being said, patches that are found in hydrologically isolated environments, such as freshwater ponds, can be treated with the usual selectively harvested care shown to other plants on which we depend.

Warnings

Watercress sometimes grows near water hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*), a deadly poisonous plant. Although the two plants bear very little resemblance to each other, be sure that you are picking only watercress leaves. Some harvesters have contracted parasites and other interesting internal visitors from watercress leaves that were not cleaned adequately. As a mild muscle relaxant, watercress can interact with certain muscle-relaxing medications.

wild chamomile

Matricaria matricarioides

pineapple weed, mayweed

EDIBLE flowers, leaves

Flowers are especially good for making a tea with pineapple notes.

The flavor and sweet, vaguely pineapple-like scent of this weedy little European plant will be familiar to most herbal tea enthusiasts who use the closely related *Anthemis* as the cornerstone ingredient of many a soporific brew. Lesser known is its unique appearance, yellow-to-green cones perched on short herbaceous stalks with lacy short leaves, looking like a small daisy with the petals gone missing. In addition to tea, wild chamomile can be used to make a passable insect repellent or potpourri, and it has several reported health benefits. Wild chamomile escaped from cultivation and now loiters on roadsides, lawns, and vacant lots near you. As with dandelion and other weedy species, harvesters can gather this chamomile to their hearts' content, having no adverse impact on native ecologies and maybe getting some unfinished weeding done in the process.

How to identify

A pineapple-scented annual herb, up to 16 inches tall, with finely dissected leaves that are divided into many narrow segments. Cone-shaped greenish yellow flowers about the size of a pea are borne singly or in clusters of up to three at the ends of the stems.

Where and when to gather

Wild chamomile is found (and spreading) in nearly all developed areas within the Pacific Northwest, on roadsides and other disturbed ground. It thrives in packed gravel like few other plants. Gather when the plant is in flower, from spring to early autumn. Avoid places where pollution is evident or likely.

How to gather

Pick flowers from the tops of their stalks. Leaves can be picked from the stem individually, or entire stalks may be taken. They can be used fresh but are dried for most uses—air dried, if possible, or with very low heat if outdoor humidity is high.

How to eat

When dry, these flowers make an excellent chamomile tea. Adjust quantities of water and flowers for desired strength and consider adding other wild herbs for diversity. The flowers and foliage (or a tea made from them) can also be used as a flavoring in cookies, pastries, and other foods. The fresh flower heads lend interesting flavor to salads.

Small and delicate, wild chamomile is adorned in graceful green leaves and crowned with aromatic yellow flowers that look like the center of a small daisy.

Future harvests

In light of this plant’s success and its continued expansion into new areas, wild propagation is probably best avoided. If you attempt to cultivate these plants in a garden setting, consider mechanisms for controlling their dispersal, such as the use of pots or other containers set where inadvertent seed-fall, trampling, and wind will not conspire to accelerate their slow-motion invasion of the Northwestern landscape.

wild ginger

Asarum caudatum

EDIBLE roots, stems

A subtler stand-in wherever you use store-bought ginger.

Wild ginger is a tasty plant of peculiar beauty, with heart-shaped green leaves and cup-shaped deep red to dark purplish brown flowers with three wispy lobes. Though slow-growing, the thin roots of this plant have a spicy flavor that serves as a fine replacement for store-bought ginger.

How to identify

Growing close to the ground, this evergreen perennial spreads from a stout rootstock, pushing its firm, shiny green leaves through the leaf mulch in which it is anchored. The undersides of the deeply heart-shaped and pointed leaves are reddish. Flowers are often at ground level and are deep red to dark purplish brown, with three long, curled lobes that taper to points.

Wild ginger’s dark green heart-shaped leaves adorn stems that creep across damp forest floors. Its oddly beautiful flowers extend three tendrils from deep red cups.

Where and when to gather

Wild ginger grows in moist forests, often near springs and streambanks. Roots are good year-round, but new growth, gathered in spring and summer, has a particularly fresh zing.

How to gather

Dig around the plant or loosen the soil. Remove young sections of root, leaving the remainder of the plant, including older, thicker, darker roots, intact.

How to eat

Wild ginger is a subtler stand-in wherever you use store-bought ginger. It can be eaten fresh or dried, as a seasoning in salads, stir fries, and baked goods.

Future harvests

Wild ginger grows slowly, so please leave most of the plant and root system intact, taking only new root segments from each plant. Replanting rootlets with a leaf or two attached can help establish ginger in new locations.

wild lily

Erythronium, *Fritillaria*, and *Lilium* species

EDIBLE bulbs, flowers, flower buds, seeds

Bulbs are sweet when cooked, with textures and flavors that range from cooked potato to cauliflower.

Some of the most beautiful flowers in the Northwest are the wild lilies. Growing from tidal flats to high mountain meadows, they adorn clearings with flowers of yellow, white, pink, purple, and brown each summer and are a favorite of hikers and gardeners alike. Although one must tread lightly and not overharvest these showy and often delicate plants, their bulbs have notable food value. They are sweet when cooked, with textures and flavors that range from cooked potato to cauliflower. Other lilies of the Pacific Northwest, such as the mariposa lily (*Calochortus* species) and the brodiaea lilies, are also edible, but in many cases they have become so very rare or live in such sensitive habitats that harvesting them is discouraged.

How to identify

Perennial herbs that grow from rhizomes, bulbs, or fleshy roots, wild lilies have leaves that are generally either paired at the base of the plant or arranged in whorls around a main stem. Flowers are large and showy, and flower parts are arranged in threes.

The flower stems of pink fawn lily (*Erythronium revolutum*) arch up from two long, thin, mottled leaves, 4 to 10 inches in length. Nodding rose pink flowers are composed of petals bent gently backward with a band of yellow in the center.

Beneath the forest canopy, harvesters are sometimes fortunate enough to encounter the wispy and delicate nodding flowers of pink fawn lily.

In the summer months, fields of yellow avalanche lilies brighten up the high country.

The bulbs of yellow avalanche lily are flavorful and can be dried for later use.

Chocolate lilies appear unassuming among their lily kin, with nodding flowers of speckled purplish brown and green.

True to their name, riceroot lilies have roots that crumble into rice-shaped bulblets when pulled from the soil.

Yellow avalanche lily (*Erythronium grandiflorum*) has two shiny green oblong leaves at the base, giving rise to a 12-inch flower stem that carries one or two nodding bright yellow flowers. Flower petals are strongly bent backward.

Chocolate lily (*Fritillaria affinis*) has lance-shaped leaves borne in whorls around yellowish stems up to 3 feet tall. Nodding bell-shaped flowers are dark purple or maroon with greenish yellow mottled spots and appear singly or in clusters.

The lance-shaped leaves of riceroot lily (*Fritillaria camschatcensis*) are arranged in whorls around sturdy stems up to 2 feet tall. Several dark green and purple to brown, bell-shaped flowers nod atop the stalks.

Riceroot lily’s darkly marbled nodding flowers can be seen in marshes, their stalks flanked by long, lance-shaped leaves.

The erect stems of tiger lily (or Columbia lily, *Lilium columbianum*) are clothed in whorls of lance-shaped leaves. Numerous flowers nod atop separate flower stalks. Flowers are light to dark orange with brown spots, widely bell-shaped, with petals flared backward.

Where and when to gather

Generally these lilies are found in moist open areas, including open woods or meadows, west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges; the fritillary lilies can also be found in tidal meadows at sea level. Lily bulbs can be gathered throughout the year, but are often most flavorful and sweet when harvested before they flower in spring or after the plant dies back in autumn. Buds, flowers, and seeds appear at different times for the various species and locations, but can be harvested as they first appear.

How to gather

Lily bulbs are generally dug gently from the ground, while avoiding impacts to unharvested plants. Take larger bulbs and leave the remainder of the bulblets in the ground for future harvest. Most harvesters air dry the bulbs for a few days before further processing. Flowers and flower buds are picked as they appear on the plant. Seeds are usually best once the pods burst of their own accord.

How to eat

Lily bulbs make a good snack when fresh; they are usually a little bitter and milky tasting, often with a spicy finish. The bulbs are especially sweet and tender when cooked and used in soups, vegetable or mashed potato–like mixtures, and the like. Riceroot lily bulblets make a respectable, if slightly bitter, rice analogue. The flowers, buds, and seeds of wild lilies are also generally palatable—often bitter but spicy and peppery—and are increasingly being incorporated into modern cuisine, both raw and cooked. Flowers and flower buds make good edible garnishes, and seeds add some spiciness to salads and other foods.

Tiger lilies appear briefly each year, filling the region with their dazzlingly bright, speckled orange flowers.

Future harvests

Wild lilies have been a favorite of Native American harvesters and deserve expanded protection and propagation so that they might persist in the repertoire of wild foods. Harvest gently with an appreciation of how the plants have been extirpated from some areas by development, overharvesting, and the suppression of traditional management methods. Native American harvesting traditions involve breaking apart clusters of bulbs and replanting the unused smaller bulbs on site, as well as cleaning bulbs at the harvest site so that all unused parts might still have a chance to grow. Burning, weeding, or pruning enhances the output of lilies where they are crowded by adjacent plants. Consider transporting separated bulbs to suitable new sites.

Warnings

Although these lilies are edible by humans, many are toxic to other animals, including pets. Also, many commercially grown lilies are toxic to humans, so do not assume that you can eat just any lily. A small number of people suffer skin irritations from contact with the juices of wild lilies; this might be taken as evidence of general sensitivity, suggesting dietary avoidance might be in order.

wild lily-of-the-valley

Maianthemum dilatatum

EDIBLE berries

As they turn red in autumn, these berries take on a tartness that tastes surprisingly similar to cranberries.

Wild lily-of-the-valley is a small but delightful plant—easily overlooked, but ignored to the detriment of any harvester. Heart-shaped leaves, in pairs and sometimes singly, dot the shady forest floor. Bright green and deeply veined, the leaves of lily-of-the-valley resemble the hostas so dear to gardeners. Where the plants are undisturbed, they become an almost solid groundcover, returning each year.

Tiny, white lily flowers line a thin stalk and transform into berries in early summer. The pea-sized berries first appear green and hard, then assume reddish brown speckles as summer wears on. By autumn, they undergo a miraculous transformation, becoming soft, red, and translucent orbs. In their green phase, they are not much to shout about, a passably edible addition to your foraging repertoire. As they turn red in autumn, they take on a tartness that tastes surprisingly similar to cranberries.

Wild lily-of-the-valley pops from the forest floor in spring, converting many bare forest floors into carpets of green hearts.

Through spring and summer, wild lily-of-the-valley’s heart-shaped leaves are punctuated by red-speckled green berries on single stalks.

How to identify

Small, upright perennial with slender stems, up to 10 inches tall. Two broad heart-shaped leaves are smooth, with long stalks and narrowly pointed ends. Small waxy white flowers are borne above the leaves along a slim stalk and develop into round red berries.

Where and when to gather

Wild lily-of-the-valley thrives on shady, moist forest floors west of the Cascade crest. The plant is especially abundant where trampling or ground disturbance has had little effect on the forest floor in recent times. Green berries can be gathered in summer. In most parts of the Pacific Northwest, red berries appear in autumn and may still be gathered into mid-winter.

How to gather

Wild lily-of-the-valley berries can be picked one by one. Because the berries grow on a thin stalk protruding above the rest of the plant, a harvester may strip off all berries from a plant in one gentle motion that leaves the rest of the plant unharmed.

How to eat

Green berries can be eaten raw, though they are hard, a bit mealy, and not especially good. Some harvesters boil the green berries and mix them with other berries; lily-of-the-valley berries take on some of the flavor of the overall mixture and add bulk when you run short of tastier berries. The red berries, with their vague resemblance to cranberry, are good raw. They seem to have potential as a cooked berry, but there is little record of this use. (Perhaps, good reader, you might experiment with cooking these berries and report the results.) Ripe red berries typically contain two hard seeds; these are often too hard to chew comfortably and can be spat out. When cooked, the seeds soften so that they might be eaten without complaint. For anyone who processes and cooks large quantities, the seeds can be separated from the berry mixture using a food mill or similar device.

Through autumn and winter, opaque green berries develop into translucent red orbs on leafless stems.

Future harvests

If you spit seeds, spit them strategically. Aim for shady and sun-dappled forest floors. If you separate seeds from processed berries, save the seeds and spread them in a suitable spot. Bare and slightly moist soil under trees sporting a rich organic layer is best—just the kind of places where you first picked the berries. The lily-of-the-valley plant grows in colonies with lateral root systems, and sections of these systems can be transplanted. For best success, choose sections that include two or more leaf stems, but don’t remove until the plants have become dormant in winter. As always, don’t take so much that it impairs the maternal patch, but intervene wisely so that you transform one robust patch into two.

wild mint

Mentha species

EDIBLE leaves, stems

Fresh leaves can be used as a seasoning for salads or a spicy flavoring for beverages.

This wonderfully aromatic plant requires little introduction. Popular as a flavoring around the world, mint also makes its home in the Pacific Northwest. Although the region has several wild mint species, with field mint (*Mentha arvensis*) being the most common, some introduced mints have escaped from cultivation and entered the wild. Each is a little different in flavor, so experimentation is urged for those seeking green and minty additions to the diet.

How to identify

A fragrant perennial herb with leafy stems, square in cross-section and up to 20 inches tall. Hairy lance-shaped leaves are borne opposite each other along the stem and have toothed edges. Round clusters of white to pale purple or pink flowers are tucked in the leaf axils.

Slightly fuzzy and resembling domesticated mint in color and shape, the leaves of wild mint emit a pleasantly minty aroma when crushed.

Lanky and sweet-smelling, wild mint pops up along waterways and other damp clearings, with clusters of pink flowers borne on stems that are square in cross-section.

Where and when to gather

Mint grows widely in wet clearings or along streambanks, lakeshores, and marshes. Gathering is best in spring and summer, when new stem and leaf sections are freshly established.

How to gather

Leaves can be picked individually, or entire stems can be picked or cut from near the base of the plant.

How to eat

Leaves can be used fresh as a seasoning for salads, a flavoring for beverages, or for many other uses. Drying of leaves for later use is common as well. Various methods are used for mint oil extraction, such as steaming or alcohol decoctions; check online for a range of options.

Future harvests

Mint often grows vigorously from rhizome sections taken from the base of the plant. Place these directly in moist soil, or start propagation by placing rhizomes in water to allow rootlets to establish prior to transplanting.

Warnings

All mints and mint oils should be consumed only in small quantities, or avoided altogether, by pregnant women, as there has been some association with an increased risk of miscarriage.

wild raspberry

Rubus idaeus (red raspberry, wild raspberry)

Rubus leucodermis (blackcap, black raspberry)

Rubus pedatus (trailing raspberry, five-leaved bramble)

EDIBLE berries, shoots, leaves

These sweet, distinctively flavored berries are outstanding fresh or cooked. The leaves are commonly gathered for teas and the shoots as a green vegetable.

In the Northwest, the hills abound with delicious wild raspberries, including the blackcap, red raspberry, and trailing raspberry. They are all closely related to some of our best wild berries: blackberry, thimbleberry, salmonberry, and other tasty-druped forest dwellers. Although not always widespread, all of these raspberries are highly esteemed wherever they are found. Native and non-Native harvesters alike relish their berries fresh or cooked in myriad ways. The leaves are commonly gathered for teas, the shoots as a green vegetable, and the berries make a passable dye. The sweet, distinctively flavored berries, though, will always be the primary attraction.

Looking and tasting like a recently escaped domestic raspberry, the red raspberry sports soft green leaves and sweet red fruit.

Adorning the forest floor with white blossoms that transform into miniature raspberries, the trailing raspberry is welcome in gardens and in the wild.

A very dark raspberry, the blackcap has a deliciously dusky flavor.

Blackcaps or black raspberries are delicious, tasting like a robust commercial raspberry; they start bright red, but grow sweeter and dusky deep purple as they ripen. The closely related red raspberry looks and tastes very much the same, but is slightly smaller, with berries that stay red instead of deepening to purple. The much smaller trailing raspberry creeps across the drippy, mossy forest floor, with tiny red raspberries that sometimes contain only one to five little drupes. Though they are tiny, they are delicious.

How to identify

Blackcap is a deciduous bramble with white powder–coated stems and many curved thorns, arching to somewhat erect, up to 6 feet long. Sets of three to five leaves are oval and toothed, underside is white-hairy. Small flowers are white to pink and cluster near the tops of branches. Hairy raspberries start red and turn to purple-black. The red raspberry is very similar to the blackcap, except fruits remain red when they ripen. Trailing

raspberry is a creeping deciduous perennial with short unarmed stems bearing up to three leaves. Each leaf is divided into five oval, deeply toothed leaflets. Small solitary white flowers with petals bent backward are borne on very slender stalks and give rise to small bright red fruit.

Where and when to gather

Blackcaps grow in conifer forests west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, usually away from the coast, whereas red raspberries grow best in riparian areas and those relatively damp forests east of the mountains. In the lower forty-eight states, trailing raspberry grows primarily in the Coast and Cascade Ranges, in boggy, soggy, mossy forests. North of the forty-ninth parallel it becomes more common at low elevations. Berries can be gathered throughout summer, but ripen noticeably later at higher elevations. Shoots and leaves are best gathered early in the growing season, when they are still soft, bright green, and pliable.

How to gather

Berries can be gathered one by one as they become ripe, with softness, size, and color being good indicators of ripeness. They are usually just a little too fragile and widely dispersed to pick several at one time. Shoots and leaves can be plucked individually from the plant.

How to eat

Wild raspberries are outstanding fresh, but they also work well in any recipe where raspberries might make sense, such as jams, jellies, sauces, and baked goods, anywhere that sweet berries might brighten up the concoction. Shoots can be eaten raw or cooked, as trailside food, a side dish, or in more daring uses like stir fries. Leaves are best when dried and made into teas.

Future harvests

Wild raspberries will usually germinate when berries are worked into the soil matrix, especially in damp sites with partial sun. The trailing raspberry may also be readily propagated from rooting runners extending from a larger plant. Like other members of the genus, raspberries often linger small

and largely berryless when in deep shade, waiting for some disturbance to give the plants light and a window of opportunity.

Warnings

Raspberry leaf is a widely popular and usually very healthy ingredient in teas for pregnant women. Raspberry leaf can cause mild uterine contractions, which some advocates see as part of its benefit, tonifying the uterus for the work ahead. Because of this effect, however, some physicians advise against its use early in a pregnancy or when the pregnancy involves unusual risks or complications. If you are pregnant and have doubts about raspberry leaf teas, avoid this plant or consult a health care provider.

wild rose

Rosa acicularis (prickly rose)

Rosa gymnocarpa (wood rose)

Rosa nutkana (Nootka rose)

Rosa woodsii (prairie rose)

EDIBLE hips, petals, leaves, shoots

The flavors of hips vary from brilliant cherry to a bland pumpkin, and they are astonishingly rich in antioxidants and vitamin C.

Wild roses have a familiar and distinctively rosy appearance, with showy pink flowers of five or more petals encircling a yellow center, all perched on green thorny stalks with compound, serrated leaves of deep green. The berry-like seedy fruits or hips that develop in the wake of fading flowers are reddish orange. Hips range from ovoid to round and squat, with flavors that vary from brilliant cherry to a bland pumpkin. Rose hips are astonishingly rich in antioxidants and contain so much vitamin C that they are commonly used as an ingredient in commercial vitamins. Rose petals and young leaves are also wonderfully useful in many foods, from teas, jams, and sweet rosewater to salads, soups, and omelets, imparting both flowery flavors and varied colors. The petals and leaves are common ingredients in medicinal preparations and potpourris. The new shoots of rose are sometimes eaten like those of thimbleberry, salmonberry, and other members of *Rubus*. Wild roses are popular as ornamental plants in native gardens.

Wild roses in the Pacific Northwest share a simple but beautiful floral geometry, with five or more pink petals and yellow accents in the center.

Wild roses of the region include the robust Nootka rose of the coastal lowland forests; the delicate, small-hipped wood rose of the swampy forests west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges; the small and slender-hipped prickly rose of interior British Columbia and Alaska; and the shrubby, widespread prairie rose found in disturbed but moist sites throughout the Pacific Northwest. Non-native roses have also become naturalized in our area, especially the rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*) of northeastern Asia, which thrives on beaches and disturbed sites, sometimes becoming invasive; this rose has become so widespread that it is often mistaken for native. All of these roses are similar in appearance and have their culinary virtues. Experiment with the wild roses in your area to see which plants work best.

How to identify

All of these wild roses are spindly to shrubby, with thorny stems and deciduous alternate leaves that are compound and toothed. Flowers have five or more petals and are followed by seedy, round reddish orange fruits or hips.

Where and when to gather

Although each species is somewhat distinctive, wild roses generally grow in moist clearings, such as along beaches and streams, roadsides, forest edges and thickets, or under the broken canopy of wet forests. Rose petals, shoots, and leaves are best gathered in spring and early summer, as they first appear on the plant. Rose hips are best gathered later in the season, from summer to autumn, as the fruits develop and ripen. Experiment with different attributes; generally larger darker hips are the ripest, but later in the season these traits may become indicators of slight overripeness.

Often round and drooping, the hips of Nootka rose sometimes have a pronounced terminal beak holding the withered petals of summer’s blooms.

Upright, oblong and orange, the hips of prickly rose light up cold-climate thickets.

How to gather

Look out for the thorns, which are often more numerous and spiny than on commercial roses. Gather hips as you would pick berries, usually one by one. Split the hip, and scrape away the seeds and small prickly hairs from the interior. Shoots should be plucked when pliable and then peeled. Gather flower petals soon after they bloom and leaves soon after they develop.

How to eat

The hips, when cleaned of seeds and all interior prickles, can be eaten fresh like a berry, dried, or cooked into cakes or more complex concoctions, from soups to baked goods, wherever a berry-like hip might make sense. Shoots are good raw, but can also be steamed and eaten like asparagus, roasted, or stir fried. Petals and leaves can be air dried for use in teas. The petals lend bright color and flowery flavor to a cornucopia of foods. Many rose enthusiasts remove the petal's white base, which is relatively bitter, leaving only the brightly colored and fragrant petal for culinary use. Fresh petals can be used in soups, baked goods, omelets, syrups, vinegars, and sauces. Rose jams are popular, made with petals or hips. Petals are often soaked in water for a day or more before cooking, while hips can be boiled like any firm fruit and mashed to make jam. Rose petals provide the key flavor for many desserts and are sometimes candied. They are also soaked in water or oil to make rosewater for various culinary purposes, mostly flavoring desserts.

Future harvests

Wild roses are readily propagated by seed, so save the seeds scraped when processing hips for later planting. Naturally occurring root sprouts and suckers can be cut from the maternal plant and transported to suitable sites. Layering of stems—burying low stems in a little soil until they root—works well, too. Do your homework to be sure that you are propagating natives and not the introduced and sometimes invasive rugosa rose.

wild strawberry

Fragaria chiloensis (beach strawberry)

Fragaria vesca (tall strawberry)

Fragaria virginiana (blue-leafed strawberry)

EDIBLE berries, leaves

Wild strawberries are often sweeter, smaller, and softer than commercial varieties.

Strawberries need little introduction, but native strawberries deserve a careful look. The region’s native strawberries outshine their store-bought counterparts on every count but size. The berries taste just like commercial varieties, but are often sweeter, smaller, and softer. The tiny white flowers of spring yield to small, bright berries, which are often slightly hidden beneath their characteristic dark green leaves. The berries are best eaten fresh.

Often hidden inconspicuously among the plant’s shiny serrated leaves, little pink to red strawberries offer a burst of sweetness and color to passing harvesters.

With shiny green leaves and white five-petaled flowers, wild strawberry resembles its cultivated relatives.

In productive patches, wild strawberries can be picked by the handful.

How to identify

Perennial with short, trailing stems. Thick, leathery leaves are divided into three round, bluntly toothed leaflets that are densely hairy on the underside. White five-petaled flowers are carried on leafless stalks and give way to small, hairy strawberries.

Where and when to gather

Three species of strawberry are common in the Northwest. The beach strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis*) lives on sandy or rocky beaches, whereas the tall strawberry (*F. vesca*) and blue-leafed strawberry (*F. virginiana*) grow as groundcovers in forest clearings, marsh edges, and similar open environments. Leaves sprout in spring, and berries ripen in summer—earlier on the coast and later in the mountains.

How to gather

Berries can be picked like any strawberry. The berries are small, occasionally hidden by leaves, and sometimes lost visually in the background of red rhizomes and other plant parts, so you may need to look closely to find the berries in some patches. Picking, storage, and transportation can be a bit challenging due to their softness. Leaves should be gathered when they are newly sprouted, pliable, and light green.

How to eat

Use as you would any strawberry, recognizing that the wild strawberries are sweet, juicy, and fragile. They are best fresh, but can also be dried or added to baked goods. The leaves, when freshly sprouted, are edible and are popular for use in herbal and medicinal teas.

Future harvests

The berries' exteriors are lined with small seeds that germinate well if you bury a few berries in prime locations. Rhizome segments from plants, or small sections of the plant separated with some root segments intact, propagate well. I have happy early childhood memories of crawling and eating my way through vast backyard groundcovers of wild strawberry that were propagated using these methods.

yampah

Perideridia species

Indian caraway, Indian potato

EDIBLE roots, seeds

Roots are often delicious, with flavors ranging from a nutty water chestnut to spicy carrots. Seeds have a caraway-like flavor.

This parsley relative is relatively short, with thread-like leaves and white umbel flowers reminiscent of those of Queen Anne’s lace or cow parsnip. Especially in marginally arid places, the finger-like roots of this plant, growing in tight underground clusters, are thick and semi-tuberous, like thin potatoes. These roots are often delicious, with flavors ranging from a nutty water chestnut to spicy carrots. Native peoples living in the drier parts of the Northwest have long savored these plants and enjoyed them as a nutritious cornerstone of the traditional diet.

How to identify

Grass-like perennial with thread-like leaves, 1 to 12 inches long, depending on soil moisture and other site conditions. Leaves wither as flowering commences. White to pinkish umbrella-shaped flower clusters are made up of several small, compact heads united on the end of one stalk.

Where and when to gather

Gathering is best in meadows and open hill slopes east of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, on ground that is seasonally damp but dries out nearly completely by summer. Spring is a good time to gather, as the roots are sweet and pliable, and flower heads can be used to find gathering sites. Autumn gathering is also possible, once the flower and leaves die back. Seeds can also be gathered in autumn.

How to gather

Gently churn up soil to loosen the whole root section of a plant, pull to the surface and remove the thicker root segments. Return the remaining portions of the plant, including smaller root segments, to the ground so that they might live to see another day. Seeds can be gathered as they appear, pulling your hands through the top of the plant or beating the plant’s stem lightly to shake seeds loose.

Yampah’s tiny white flowers sit on stalks, each arranged in circular patterns like those of carrots or Queen Anne’s lace. During spring harvest the plant is often nondescript, with long thin oval leaves arranged on opposite sides of lanky stems.

How to eat

Tasty raw, like a small carrot, the roots can also be roasted, steamed, or otherwise cooked to bring out their richer flavors. Seeds have a caraway-like flavor and can be used as a seasoning.

Future harvests

Avoid localized overharvesting. Traditional harvesters recommend cleaning the roots on site, so that rootlets and other fragments can be returned to the ground to keep a patch viable. Thick roots can be transplanted to like sites, and seeds can be selectively gathered in autumn for broader distribution.

Warnings

Many plants have the same general flower structure as yampah, and a few of them are deadly poisonous. Fortunately, those dangerous plants generally live in very different environments, such as wetlands, and lack the characteristic clusters of thick roots and mild caraway scent. Be very sure that what you are gathering is yampah. When eaten in large quantities, yampah has a mild laxative effect.

yarrow

Achillea millefolium

EDIBLE leaves, flowers, stems

Yarrow lends a welcome bite when added to herbal teas.

The wildly dissected leaves of yarrow are frilly to the point that they are often compared with fern fronds or squirrel tails. The plant is widespread beyond the Pacific Northwest and genetically malleable; ornamental non-native varieties with flowers of many different colors have long been included in gardens throughout the region. Yarrow makes a pleasant tea. It is pungent and sometimes a bit bitter or medicinal in taste when by itself, but it lends a welcome bite when added to multi-ingredient mixtures. Yarrow is widely known by Native and non-Native herbalists as an important medicinal plant, especially used for soothing respiratory complaints and other irritations, so it is included in many therapeutic teas, tinctures, and poultices. Many miraculous health benefits are reported; if even some of them are true, we should be looking carefully at yarrow as a medicinal plant and for its culinary opportunities.

Bright white yarrow flowers grow in dense clusters atop fuzzy stalks adorned with lacy squirrel-tail foliage.

How to identify

Loosely clumping, feathery perennial herb with hairy, fern-like leaves, 1 to 3 feet tall. White flowers form in flat-topped, many-headed clusters and develop into dry, flattened seed heads.

Where and when to gather

Yarrow is widespread throughout the Pacific Northwest, being especially fond of open meadows, roadsides, and other clearings that are moist but well-drained places. The leaves and stems appear in spring and can be gathered as soon as they arrive. The flowers develop soon thereafter and should be picked when young.

How to gather

Pick a few leaves from a plant, or cut an entire plant from the stalk base for drying. Air drying works fine when humidity is low, but a little added heat may hasten the drying process. The brilliantly green young leaves have a slightly different flavor and are often more pungent than the darker, more mature leaves, so experiment to find your preference. Flowers should be picked when relatively fresh, as they can get somewhat dry, musty, or dusty-tasting with time. Seeds are best before winter rains and snows begin in earnest.

Growing in meadows and other cleared areas, yarrow’s lacy leaves and white flowers are a common and highly visible part of many Northwestern scenes.

How to eat

A few leaves, flowers, and/or seeds steeped in water will make a very good tea. Experiment with mixtures of other native and naturalized herbs, such as field mint, to give it a richer flavor and curb the bitterness.

Future harvests

Seed clusters appear atop yarrow stalks in autumn and can be easily gathered for dispersal elsewhere by grasping a handful or by shaking the stalk vigorously. Sections of the lateral underground rhizome can be cut out of large patches and transplanted to suitable locations. In certain settings, such as on disturbed ground, yarrow can be invasive, so foster its spread with due caution.

Warnings

Some people are mildly allergic to the oils in yarrow, so those with no prior exposure to this plant should first experiment with a small sample before guzzling pots of yarrow tea.

yellow pond-lily

Nuphar polysepala

EDIBLE seeds, leaves, flower buds, roots

Seeds can be parched or roasted and eaten whole or ground into a cracked cereal or flour. Fresh flower and leaf buds can be used as a slightly tangy potherb in soups or cooked green mixes.

With its bright yellow flowers and oval to heart-shaped floating leaves, the familiar native pond-lily of the Northwest is also a surprisingly good food source. Klamath and Modoc Indians traditionally gathered and roasted the seeds in large quantities; the resulting cereal product was critical to their diet and almost achieved commercial success. The root is passably edible, while the freshly sprouted leaves and flower buds work as a slightly tangy potherb. Although little known, this ubiquitous pond-lily may deserve a second look by modern harvesters.

How to identify

Perennial aquatic with massive roots and large leaves, oval or heart-shaped, growing up to 12 inches wide and carried on long stalks. Flowers are yellow with knob-shaped centers and thick petals. Pod-shaped fruit contains many seeds.

Where and when to gather

Yellow pond-lily grows in standing fresh water, in ponds and lake margins. Fresh leaves and flower buds can be gathered as they emerge in spring. Seeds begin to mature in late spring and continue to be found throughout summer. Root gathering is best in spring or autumn, but possible in other seasons.

How to gather

Leaves and flower buds can be plucked as they appear on the water’s surface in spring. The seeds are found in large numbers, suspended in gel inside a leathery pod that appears in the flower’s wake. Pods can be gathered when they begin to show signs that they will soon open independently. Seeds should be washed of their gelatinous covering and allowed to dry.

How to eat

Pond-lily seeds can be parched or roasted and eaten whole or ground into a cracked cereal or flour for various recipes. The fresh flower and leaf buds can be used as a potherb in soups or mixes of cooked greens.

Future harvests

Yellow pond-lily grows well from seeds or rhizomes, but seed dispersal is probably easiest. Ideally, work the seeds into muddy ground exposed during the low waters of late summer.

Yellow pond-lily, with its distinctive yellow flower and lily pads, rises just above the water’s surface.

yerba buena

Satureja douglasii

EDIBLE leaves

Leaves make a pleasant-tasting tea: sweet, savory, and almost spicy.

Here and there in the drier forests west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges, harvesters may encounter this little plant creeping over the ground and adjacent plants, with its pleasantly aromatic leaves in bright green pairs sitting opposite each other on the short but sturdy stem. Crush the leaves and sniff; if a plant fitting this description gives off a pleasing scent that seems to invite tea-making, it is likely to be yerba buena, Spanish for “good plant.” Yerba buena is one of the most popular wild plants to be found in North America. A sweet, savory, and almost spicy tea has been made by Native and non-Native harvesters alike for generations. Yerba buena also has a great reputation as a medicinal plant, used in teas, tinctures, and poultices for various complaints.

Creeping through the forest with small leaves along a central stem, yerba buena has virtues that outshine its nondescript appearance.

How to identify

Vining, trailing perennial herb, 1 to 3 feet long. Smooth, oval leaves appear opposite one another along the slender stem and are purple beneath. Solitary, dainty white flowers are borne where the leaves meet the stem.

Where and when to gather

Yerba buena is especially common in drier forests and thickets in the less rainy areas west of the Cascade and Canadian Coast Ranges and in damp areas to the east. The leaves appear in spring and can be gathered throughout much of summer.

How to gather

Pick a few leaves from each plant. The smaller young leaves and larger more mature leaves have slightly different flavors, so experiment to find

your preference. They can be used fresh, but are often air dried for later use.

How to eat

A few leaves steeped in water will make a very good tea; make it weaker for everyday use, or stronger if you seek more complex and potent flavors. Some experiments with yerba buena for use as a seasoning or a potherb mixed into other greens suggest broader culinary opportunities.

Future harvests

Small nut-like seeds can be found in late summer or autumn, usually in clusters of four near the leaf stems; these can be planted in suitable sites. The plant often establishes roots along its stem or extends lateral rhizomes from established plants. Rooting sections of each can be cut away and replanted in suitable sites.

Metric Conversions

Inches	Centimeters
¼	0.6
⅓	0.8
½	1.3
¾	1.9
1	2.5
2	5.1
3	7.6
4	10
5	13
6	15
7	18
8	20
9	23
10	25

Feet	Meters
1	0.3
2	0.6
3	0.9
4	1.2
5	1.5
6	1.8
7	2.1

8	2.4
9	2.7
10	3

Temperatures

degrees Celsius = $^{5}/_{9}$ × (degrees Fahrenheit – 32)
degrees Fahrenheit = ($^{9}/_{5}$ × degrees Celsius) + 32

To convert length:	**Multiply by:**
Yards to meters	00.9
Inches to centimeters	02.54
Inches to millimeters	25.4
Feet to centimeters	30.5

Recommendations for Further Reading

So many good sources on native plants of the Pacific Northwest are available that a complete review of this literature might represent a book in itself. I mention some good sources here for readers who seek more details on certain topics, help with difficult plant identifications, or simple inspiration in their quest to explore and harvest wild plant foods.

I am not being partisan when I say that Timber Press is unique in its attention to Pacific Northwest plants and has published an outstanding range of plant identification books. Eugene Kozloff's *Plants of Western Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia* is a good case in point. General identification guides have sometimes been produced by other presses, though, and one of the best in this category is *Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast*, edited by Jim Pojar and Andy MacKinnon (Lone Pine). This book includes some details on food use and ethnobotany and has a strong British Columbia emphasis, though it gives relatively thin attention to places south of the border. Meanwhile, anyone concerned about poisonous plants may want to consult a guide specifically on that topic; consider *The North American Guide to Common Poisonous Plants and Mushrooms* by Nancy J. Turner and Patrick von Aderkas (Timber Press).

On the matter of Native American botanical knowledge in the region, the work of the preeminent ethnobotanist (and photographic contributor to the current volume) Nancy J. Turner stands alone. Of particular relevance to plant gathering, one should consult her three guidebooks, *Food Plants of Coastal First Peoples*, *Food Plants of Interior First Peoples*, and *Plant Technology of First Peoples in British Columbia* (all from the Royal British Columbia Provincial Museum). A very useful, encyclopedic synthesis of traditional plant use, organized both by plant species and by tribe, can be found in Daniel Moerman's *Native American Ethnobotany* (Timber Press).

The matter of propagating native plants is dealt with only very briefly in this book, but the topic deserves more attention by anyone seeking to extensively cultivate wild plants. Books on this topic all owe some kind of debt to the classic *Gardening with the Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest* by Arthur Kruckeberg (University of Washington Press). More recently, some good works have been produced that expand beyond Kruckeberg's early work, such as the *Encyclopedia of Northwest Native Plants for Gardens and Landscapes* by Kathleen Robson, Alice Richter, and Marianne Filbert (Timber Press); *Native Plants in the Coastal Garden* by April Pettinger (Timber Press); and *Propagation of Pacific Northwest Native Plants* by Robin Rose, Caryn Chachulski, and Diane L. Haase (Oregon State University Press).

Although several guides purport to describe edible plants found across North America, the lack of regional specificity makes these books difficult to use, and I would only recommend them as backup sources. A handful of older guides do address edible plants in the Pacific Northwest. Those seeking an emphasis upon weedier, non-native plants of the Pacific Northwest might consider *Edible Wild Plants: Wild Foods from Dirt to Plate* by John Kallas (Gibbs Smith) and *Northwest Foraging* by Doug Benoliel (Skipstone). I hold these works and their authors in tremendously high esteem. Matters of press loyalty aside, they can have my copies of Kallas and Benoliel when they "pry them from my cold dead hands!"

The recommendation of websites is a tricky business, as new ones arrive and old ones depart (or change domain names) frequently. There is a risk that information may be outdated by the time the ink has dried on this page. Still, I venture a few options. To assist in the identification of wild plants, there are many useful websites. Prominent among these is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's PLANTS database (plants.usda.gov), which provides information on plant identification and range, as well as photos of most common species. The Plants for a Future website (pfaf.org) is also of great value, allowing a person to enter plant names and retrieve information on a plant's characteristics, food value, and other properties. Some very useful university and governmental guides are being posted online each year, such as the Electronic Atlas of the Flora of British Columbia (geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/eflora), the Field Guide to Noxious and Other

Selected Weeds of British Columbia (agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/weedguid/weedguid.htm), the Washington State Department of Transportation's Ethnobotany and Cultural Resources guide (wsdot.wa.gov/Environment/CulRes/ethnobotany.htm), and Oregon State University's Oregon Flora Project (oregonflora.org). Private websites, such as that of Northern Bushcraft (northernbushcraft.com), are also extremely useful, especially when cross-checking information from various sources. In truth, some of the most commonly used websites, such as Wikipedia, are increasingly useful at providing information regarding specific plant species, and a simple Google search on any plant name in this book will reveal to you a wealth of photos and information from diverse sources that should make false identifications nearly impossible in any location with Internet access.

With the intention of preventing overharvesting of wild plants, some very useful international standards have been developed for sustainable wild plant harvests by organizations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (cms.iucn.org) and the FairWild Foundation (fairwild.org); interested harvesters might check their websites.

Native plant societies have large amounts of information about regionally available plants, as well as a membership that shares interests in plants and organizes field trips and other events. For those in the Pacific Northwest, consider visiting the websites of the Native Plant Society of Oregon (npsoregon.org), the Washington Native Plant Society (wnps.org), the Native Plant Society of British Columbia (npsbc.ca), or the Alaska Native Plant Society (aknps.org).

There are also several organizations that seek to cultivate interest in the culinary opportunities afforded by wild plant foods. For Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia, check out the Multnomah Food Initiative (multfood.org), Fresh-Picked Seattle (freshpickedseattle.com), and the Urban Herb School (urbanherbschool.ca), respectively. Bear in mind that these are just examples, and a little Internet searching will reveal a wealth of other opportunities.

In a few rare instances, individuals have developed enduring institutes with the promotion of wild plant gathering as their goal, offering seminars, guided field trips, and a range of other services. Among these wild food

entrepreneurs is John Kallas, a Portland-based plant foraging aficionado known for his infectious enthusiasm, who has developed the Institute for the Study of Edible Wild Plants and Other Foragables (wildfoodadventures.com). Comparable programs are offered by such organizations as Earthwalk Northwest (earthwalknorthwest.com), which especially helps to get urban Northwesterners out on the land to see wild edible plants in their native habitats.

Many outstanding blogs on the subject of wild plant foods are available, with seemingly more of them every day. They are too numerous to list here, but one of the best, Wild Harvests (arcadianabe.blogspot.com), is written by Abe Lloyd, a friend and former student of both Nancy Turner and me. His is the *Cook's Illustrated* of Northwestern wild food blogs, involving systematic efforts to learn what makes wild foods most productive and palatable, from preparation techniques to the best times of the year for harvests. No doubt, we will learn a lot in the years ahead from the experimentation of Abe and those of his ilk. Stay tuned, and keep searching the Internet for new information!

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I would like to start by thanking all of my teachers, past and present, who contributed to my knowledge of Northwest plants and their many uses. First and foremost, I thank the Native American elders who have shared with me —always patiently and sometimes urgently—the wisdom of their ancestors so that this knowledge might persist and guide future generations. *Gilakasla ninogad, sepk'eec'a, ck'wálidxw, gunalchéesh,* your teachings will always be deeply appreciated and mindfully employed. So, too, I thank the many professors, family members, and friends who have contributed tremendously to my understanding of plants over the years. Thanks especially to my mother for all those heady days in the 1970s that we spent rambling around, as you introduced me to all of the plants one by one.

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About the Author

MAYA DOOLEY

Douglas Deur has been gathering native plants his whole life. With family roots and a home base on the Oregon coast, he has continued to enthusiastically gather, use, and share native plant foods, teaching his children, his neighbors, and visitors about the rich biological and cultural heritage of the Pacific Northwest. In his professional life, Doug serves as a cultural ecologist for Native peoples of the western United States and Canada, documenting enduring plant use practices as well as the rituals, values, and technologies that have shaped traditional resource harvests and

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